

# The Chapel of Physicians at Santa Maria Antiqua\*

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On 27 June 414 Bishop Cyril of Alexandria addressed a crowd gathering in the Church of the Apostles at Canopus in Egypt. The occasion was the translation of the relics of the two saints Abbakynos and John from Alexandria to the Church of the Evangelists at Menuthis. Cyril quite frankly explained the purpose of this act: in Menuthis and the nearby town of Canopus even Christians, when they got ill, tended to consult the dream oracles at the shrines of the Egyptian gods Sarapis and Isis medica. The reason for this weakness the bishop ascribed to the fact that there was nowhere in the vicinity the tomb of a famous martyr toward which sick Christians could have turned for help. Therefore, Cyril installed the relics of the two saints in order to replace the pagan shrines.<sup>1</sup> When in a second speech on the following day—now in the church at Menuthis—Cyril condemned the practice of dream oracles, so-called incubation, taking place at the pagan temples, he did not foresee that precisely this practice was to become a most significant feature of the cult of Sts. Abbakynos and John as well as other medical saints throughout the East for centuries to come, a procedure closely associated with their shrines, relics, and images. This study, however, explores the way religious imagery worked for the sick in early medieval Rome. The idea that a cult of medical saints actually involving incubation might have taken place in Rome has generally been dismissed because of the absence of any documentary evidence. Whether a study of the imagery provides further information remains to be seen.

## SANTA MARIA ANTIQUA: THE DIAKONIKON

Since the excavations of 1900–1901, S. Maria Antiqua, the ancient church at the foot of the Palatine Hill, has been recognized as an exceptionally rich source of information

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<sup>1</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Oratiunculæ tres in translatione reliquiarum SS. Martyrum Cyri et Joannis*, PG 77:1099–1106. *DACL* 1:1113–14. Epiphanius, *Ancoratus* §109, PG 43:209. Menuthis had since changed its name to Aboukir (Abba Kyros). P. Sinthorn, “Der römische Abbacyrus in Geschichte, Legende und Kunst,” *RQ* 22 (1908): 202; H. Delehay, “Les saints d’Aboukir,” *AB* 30 (1911): 448–50; D. Montserrat, “Pilgrimage to the Shrine of SS Cyrus and John at Menouthis in Late Antiquity,” in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. D. Frankfurter (Leiden, 1998), 261–66; J. Osborne, “The Atrium of S. Maria Antiqua, Rome: A History in Art,” *PBSR* 55 (1987): 207.

about cult forms and the role played by images in the period preceding Iconoclasm and beyond.<sup>2</sup> This may have its reason in a landslide in 847 that left the church partly destroyed and subsequently abandoned and thus unchanged for roughly a millennium.<sup>3</sup>

Although this study deals with the cultic function of one particular chapel, it is at this point necessary to embark on some preliminary, more general remarks on the church. The structure that forms S. Maria Antiqua, built originally as a ceremonial hall and later perhaps used as a guard room in connection with the palaces on the Palatine, was at some time during the later sixth century converted into a church.<sup>4</sup> Situated on the rise of the Palatine Hill, the building is adjacent to the Temple of Castor and Pollux and the Horrea Agrippiana with the church of S. Teodoro. The existing space was adapted to a Greek plan, with a *bema*, the presbytery leading to a *prothesis* on the left and a *diakonikon* on the right-hand side of the apse (Fig. 1). All the saints depicted in the *diakonikon* are Eastern; all inscriptions are in Greek. The style of the frescoes has been described as “Hellenistic” and has provoked extensive research into the development of “Hellenism” in early medieval Roman wall painting, while the artists—at least those of the first generation—are commonly assumed to have been Byzantines.<sup>5</sup> S. Maria Antiqua was the church of a Greek community closely associated with the Byzantine administration residing on the Palatine. A Byzantine quarter established itself during the sixth and seventh centuries between the Palatine and the area around Torre delle Milizie; there was a major influx of Greek immigrants from Egypt into the city after the Arab conquest of Alexandria in 641.<sup>6</sup>

The *diakonikon*, already quite adequately labeled “The Chapel of Physicians” by Joseph Wilpert,<sup>7</sup> contains a fresco cycle of medical saints of Eastern origin, the Anargyroi, the healers who do not take money.<sup>8</sup> It has long been established, on stylistic grounds as well as for palaeographic reasons, that the paintings in the chapel were executed during the

<sup>2</sup> G. M. Rushforth, “The Church of S. Maria Antiqua,” *PBSR* 1 (1902): 1–123. See also W. de Grèneisen, *Sainte-Marie-Antique* (Rome, 1911); J. Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis XIII. Jahrhundert*, vol. 2 (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1917), 653–726; idem, “Sancta Maria Antiqua,” *L’Arte* 13 (1910): 1–20, 81–107; P. Romanelli and P. J. Nordhagen, *S. Maria Antiqua* (Rome, 1964); M. Avery, “The Alexandrian Style in S. Maria Antiqua,” *ArtB* 7 (1925): 131–49; E. Tea, *La basilica di Santa Maria Antiqua* (Milan, 1937); E. Kitzinger, “Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm,” in *Berichte zum Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress* (Munich, 1958); idem, “On Some Icons of the VII Century,” in *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honour of A. M. Friend, Jr.* (Princeton, N.J., 1955), 132–50; A. Weis, “Ein vorjustinianischer Ikonentypus in S. Maria Antiqua,” *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 8 (1958): 17–61.

<sup>3</sup> This was probably the result of an earthquake mentioned in the *Liber Pontificalis*, 2:108: “terre motus in urbe Roma”; cf. R. Krautheimer, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae*, vol. 2 (Vatican City, 1962), 252 (hereafter *CBCR*).

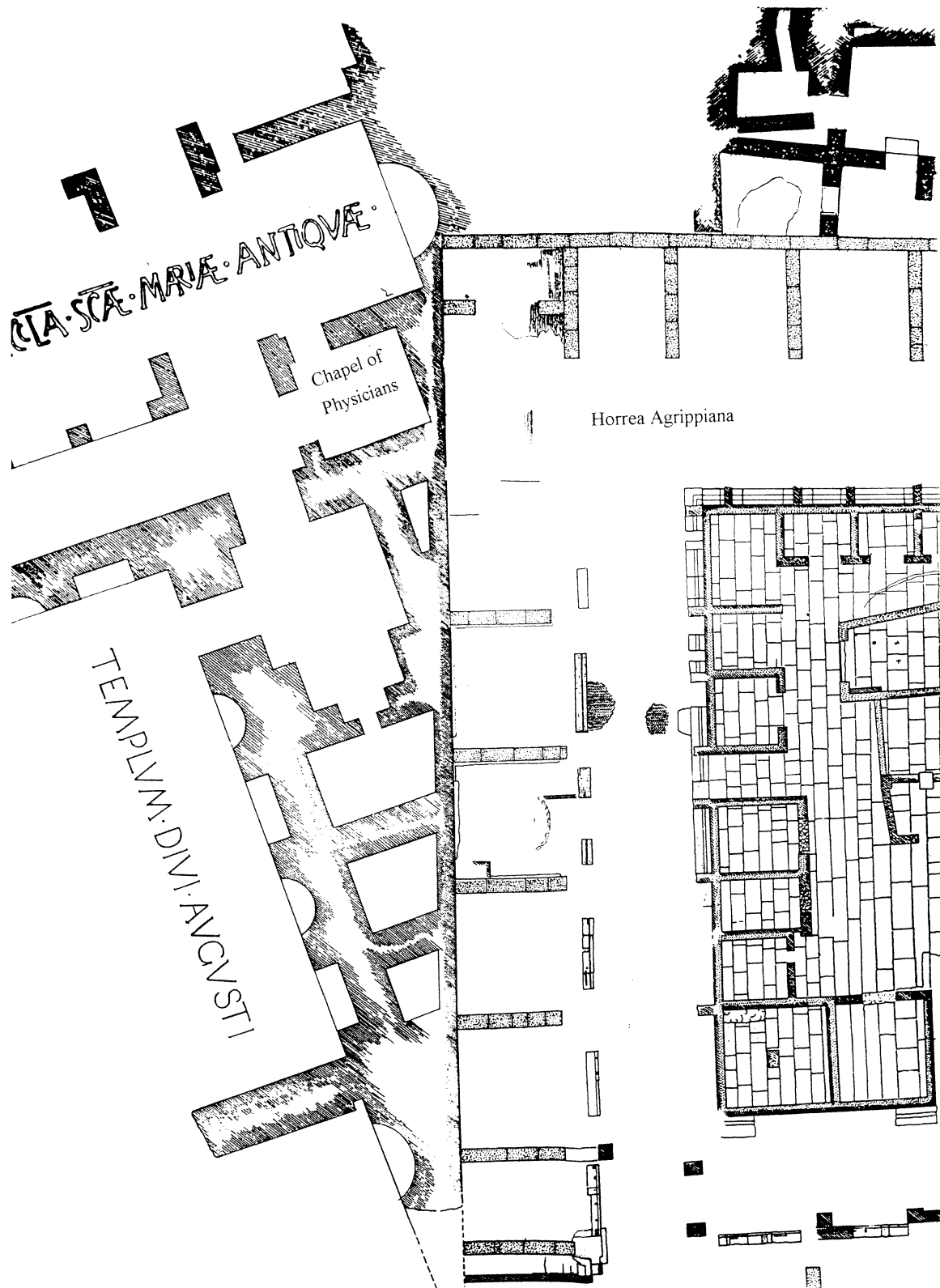
<sup>4</sup> The conversion of the 1st-century building is not mentioned before the mid-7th century; cf. Krautheimer, *CBCR* 2:251, 269–70; see also idem, *Rome: Profile of a City* (Princeton, N.J., 1980), 71. For a comprehensive analysis of the building and the various phases of its development and use, see Krautheimer, *CBCR* 2:251–70 with survey plans, pls. XVIII, XIX; for the pre-Christian edifice, see also R. Delbrück, “Der Südostbau am Forum Romanum,” *JDAI* 36 (1921): 8–33, 186–87.

<sup>5</sup> For a critical review of the discussion of “Hellenism” in S. Maria Antiqua and its origin, see P. J. Nordhagen, “‘Hellenism’ and the Frescoes in Santa Maria Antiqua,” *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 41 (1972): 73–80. See also Krautheimer, *Profile*, 99–105, who like Kitzinger settles for a Constantinopolitan origin of the Hellenistic influence, and also raises the question as to whether the artists were imported from Byzantium. M. Dvorák, *Der Palazzo di Venezia in Rom* (Vienna, 1909), 37–42.

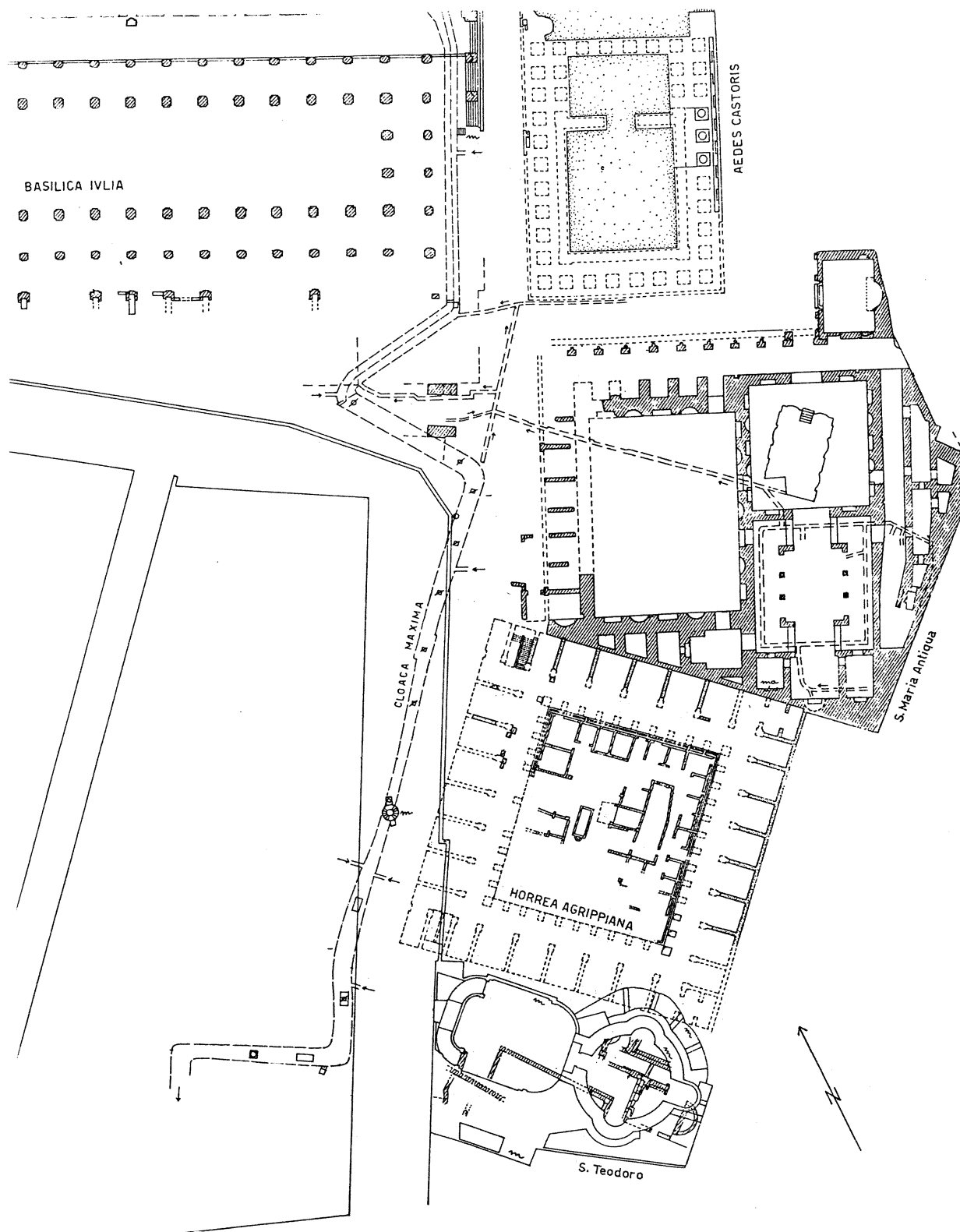
<sup>6</sup> On the Byzantine quarter, see Krautheimer, *Profile*, 76; J.-M. Sansterre, *Les moines grecs et orientaux à Rome aux époques Byzantine et carolingienne*, vol. 1 (Brussels, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Wilpert, *Mosaiken und Malereien*, 675.

<sup>8</sup> For a survey of the extant paintings, see P. J. Nordhagen, “The Frescoes of John VII (AD 705–707) in S. Maria Antiqua in Rome,” *ActaIRNorv* 3 (1968): 55–66.

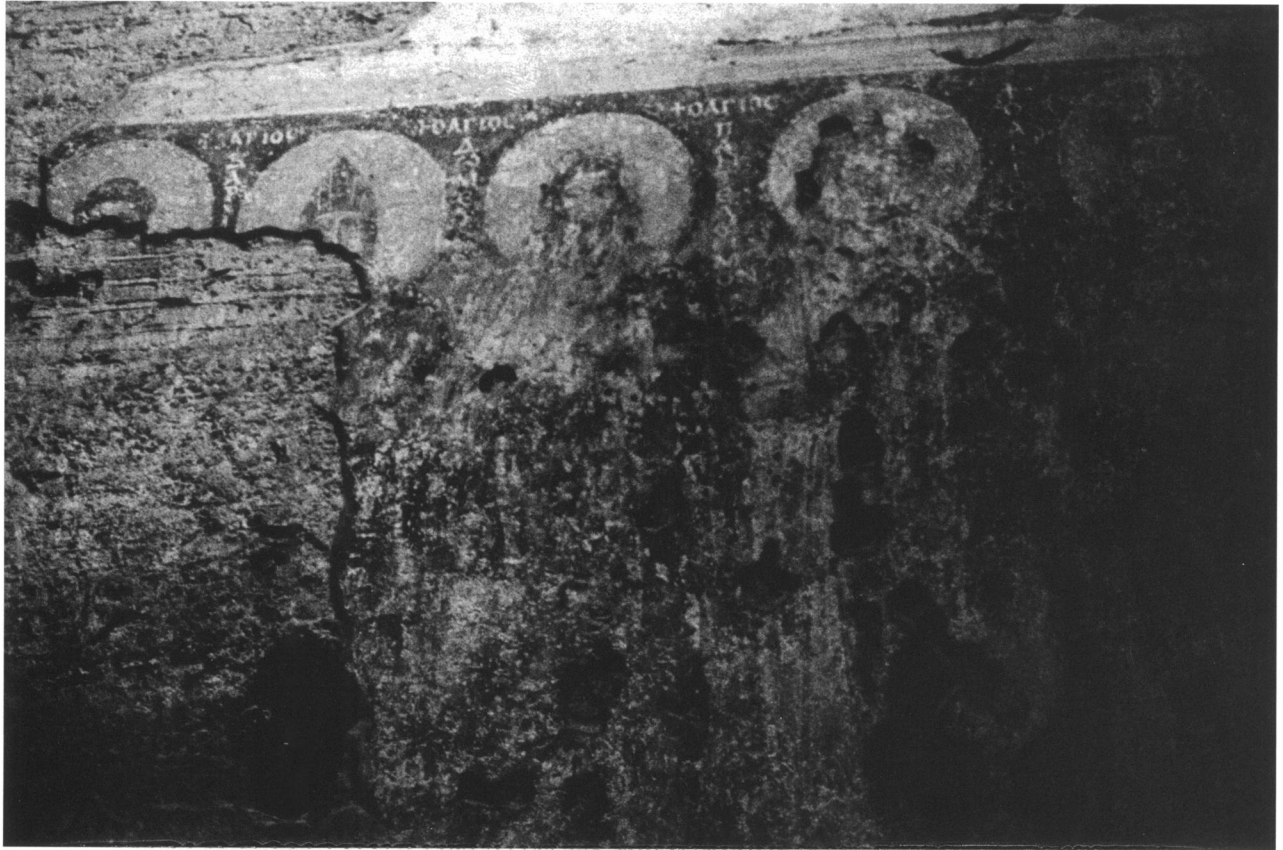


- 1 Survey plan of S. Maria Antiqua/Horrea Agrippiana, Rome (after A. Bartoli, "Gli Horrea Agrippiana," *MonAnt* 27 [1921]: fig. 1, modified)

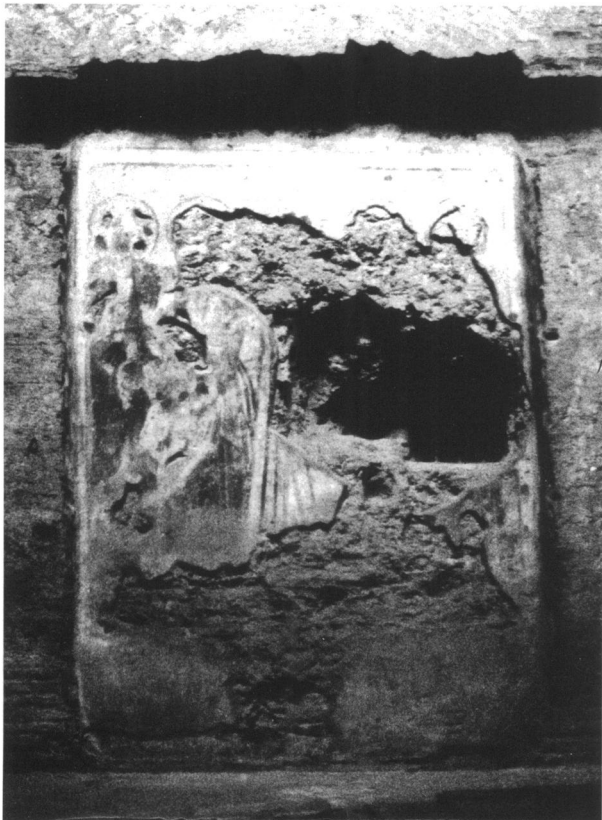


2 Topography of area west of the Palatine Hill, Rome (after H. Bauer, "Un Tentativo di ricostruzione," *ArchCl* 30 [1978]: fig. 6)





3 Chapel of Physicians, west wall, S. Maria Antiqua, Rome, 705–707 A.D.



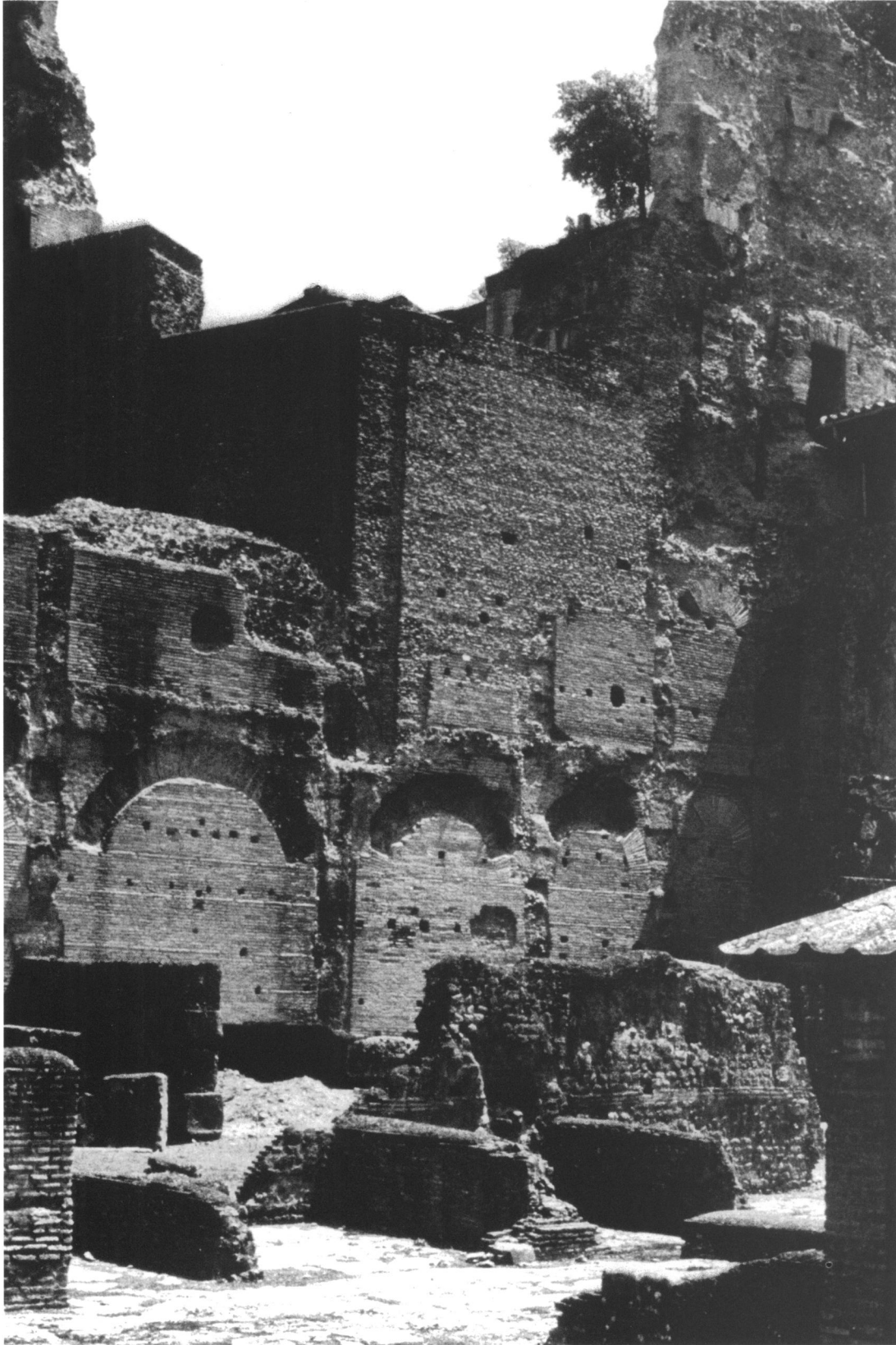
4 Chapel of Physicians, niche in south wall, S. Maria Antiqua, Rome, 705–707 A.D.



5 Chapel of Physicians, icon in the niche of south wall, S. Maria Antiqua, Rome, 705–707 A.D.



6 Horrea Agrippiana, view toward the Palatine Hill, Rome



7 Horrea Agrippiana, view toward S. Maria Antiqua, Rome

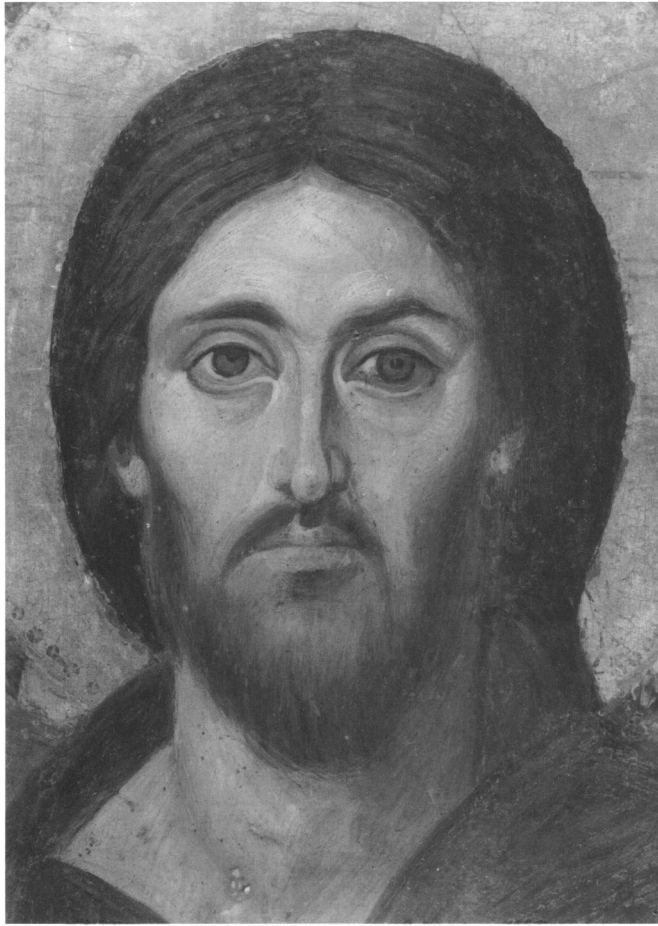


8 Leaf of triptych with St. Damianos, St. Catherine  
monastery, Mount Sinai, 7th century A.D.  
(photo: Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to  
Mount Sinai)



9 Chapel of Physicians, west wall, head of saint,  
S. Maria Antiqua, Rome, 705-707 A.D.  
(after P.J. Nordhagen, "The Frescoes of John  
VII," *ActaIRNorv* 3 [1968]: pl. LXXV)





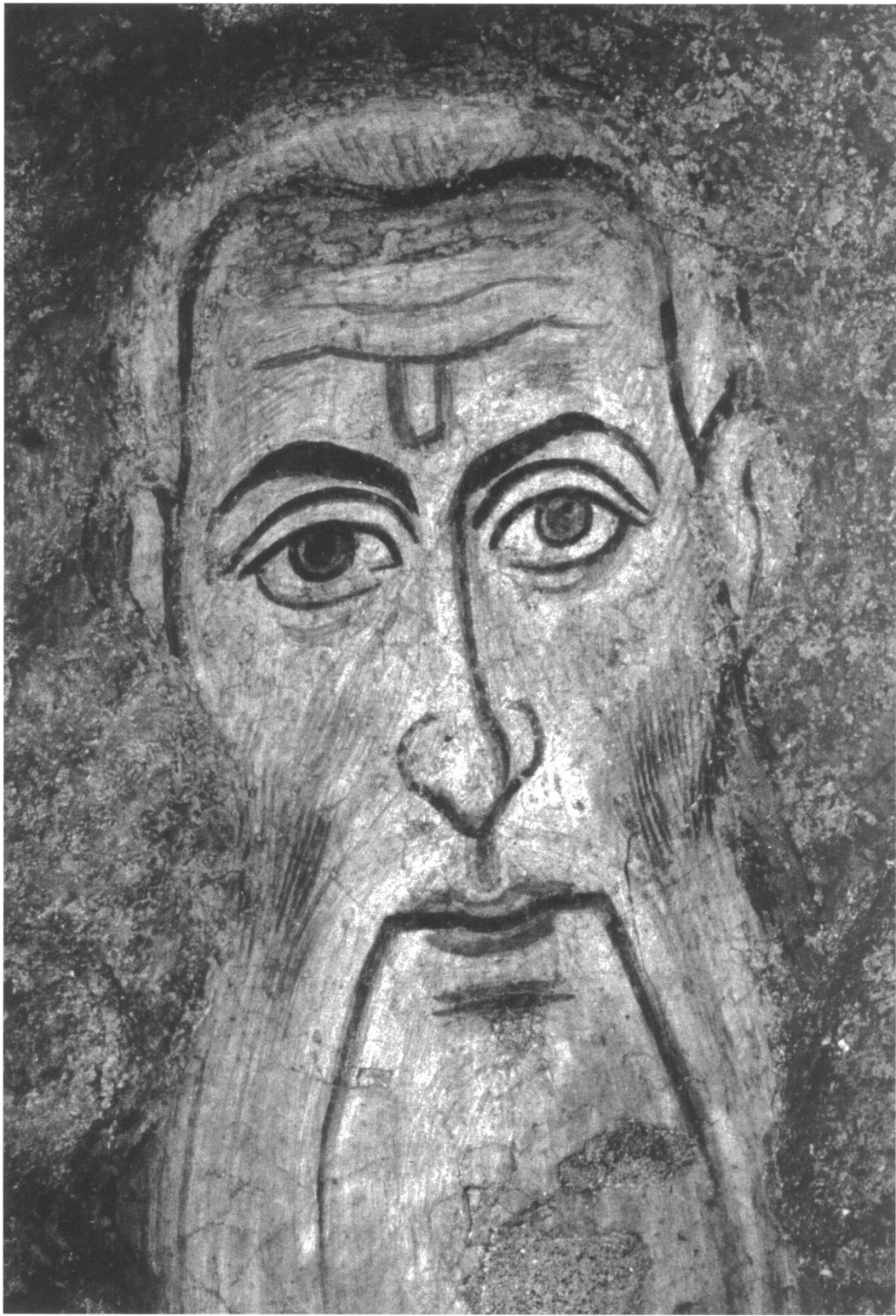
10 Icon of Christ Pantokrator, St. Catherine monastery, Mount Sinai, end of 6th century A.D.  
(photo: Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai)



11 Head of Sarapis, Louvre, Paris, 2nd century A.D.  
(after W. Hornbostel, *Sarapis* [Leiden, 1973], pl. CXLIII)



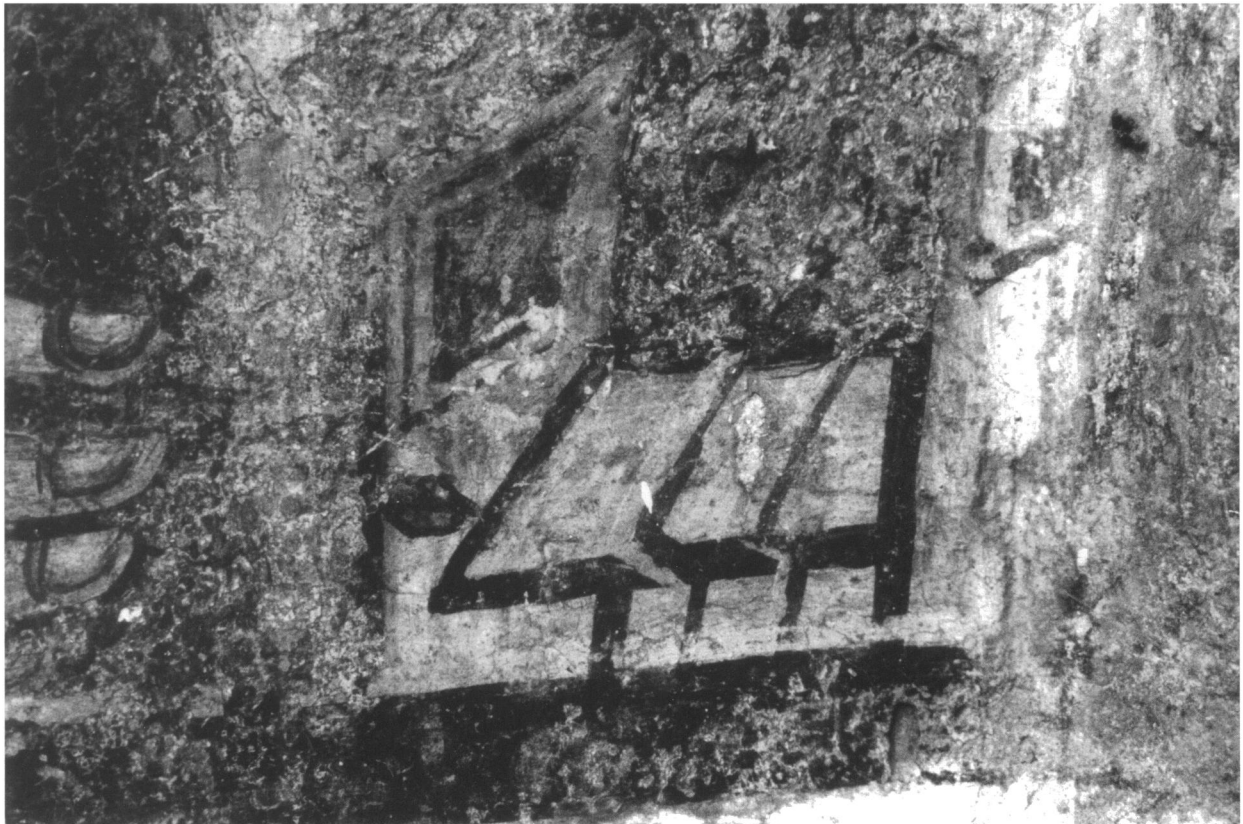
12 Icon of St. Abbakyros, atrium, S. Maria Antiqua, Rome, 757–767 A.D.



13 Head of St. Abbakyros, atrium, S. Maria Antiqua, Rome, 757–767 A.D.



14 Icon of St. Abbakyros (detail), atrium, S. Maria Antiqua, Rome, 757–767 A.D.

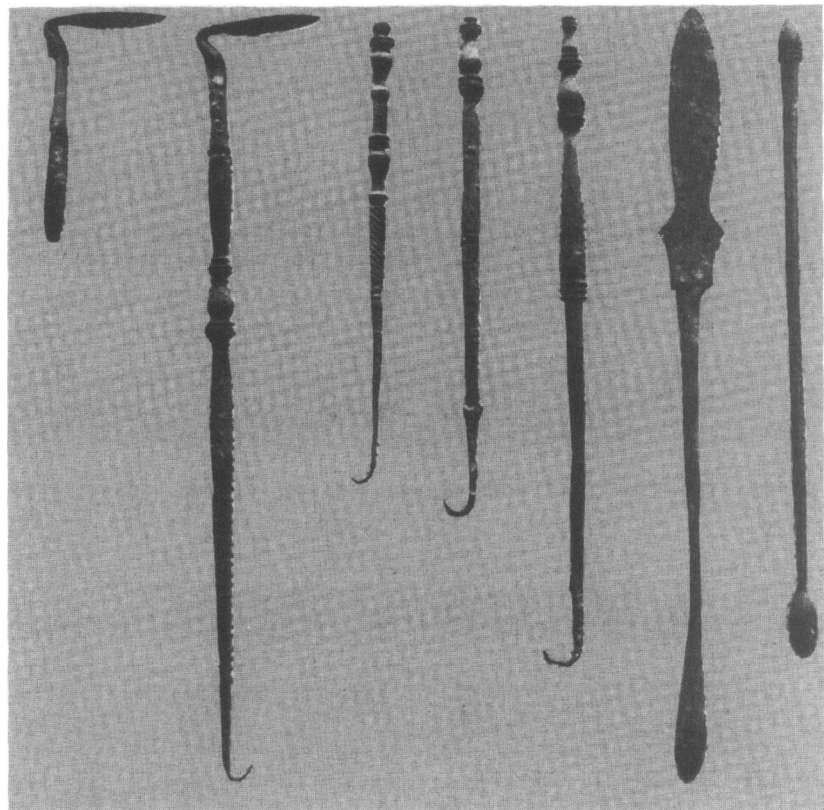


15 Icon of St. Abbakyros (detail), atrium, S. Maria Antiqua, Rome, 757–767 A.D.





16 Surgical instruments from excavations at Kolophon, 5th century B.C. (after R. Caton, "Notes," *JHS* 34 [1914]: pl. x)



17 Surgical instruments from *Durocortorum Remorum*, 2nd or 3rd century A.D. (after E. Kunzl, *Medizinische Instrumente* [Bonn, 1983], fig. 35)



18 Icon of St. Basil, St. Catherine monastery, Mount Sinai, 7th century A.D.  
(photo: Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai)

papacy of John VII (705–707), a Greek pope.<sup>9</sup> Entering the Chapel of Physicians through the doorway from the presbytery, one faces the west wall, decorated with a row of saints and a painted *velum* below. This decoration is continued on the north wall where the painting is interrupted by the doorway to the west aisle. On the east wall remain only traces of fresco, and there are fragments of paint in the doorways leading to the west aisle and presbytery. The south wall contains a large niche, decorated again with a row of saints. The condition of the frescoes in the chapel is rather worn compared to other parts of John VII's decoration. By far the best-preserved part of the murals in the chapel is the row of saints on the west wall. Six standing figures, accompanied by inscriptions, can be distinguished (Fig. 3). Of the first on the left, only the lower part of the legs remains. The next figure to the right, of which the upper part of the head with the halo and the lower part of the legs survive, shows remains of an accompanying inscription which led G. M. Rushforth to believe it might be St. Barachisius, a Persian martyr.<sup>10</sup> Of the next saint to the right, the hooded head and upper part of the face are preserved, as well as the halo, the right side of the body, and the lowest portion of the legs. The fairly well preserved inscription names him as St. Dometios, a hermit who performed various healing miracles.<sup>11</sup> The saint carries a surgeon's box of which traces remain.<sup>12</sup>

The next figure on the right is for several reasons the most problematic of all the saints depicted in the chapel.<sup>13</sup> Although the surface is rather rubbed and many small *lacunae* occur, the figure survives in its entire height with no larger losses and is therefore the best preserved in the chapel. The saint wears a brownish tunic, a purple-red pallium, and sandals; he holds a scroll with both his hands; the left—covered in the pallium—carries a surgeon's box with a carrying strap. His long, almost black hair and flowing beard, the large dark eyes with vividly rendered strong eyebrows, and the small cap he wears (see Fig. 9) set him distinctly apart from all other saints in the chapel, as does the dark purplish pallium. The overall impression of the figure is, in costume and type, a markedly classical one; there is nothing quite like it within the entire church decoration. There has always been a confusion about the identity of this figure. Although Rushforth<sup>14</sup> had already rightly pointed out that it is not accompanied by an inscription—according to him, this might be due to a miscalculation of space—Wilpert and other scholars connected the figure with the fully preserved inscription “Agios Panteleemon” on the right.<sup>15</sup> But this name, for iconographic reasons, clearly belongs to the youthful saint next to him on the right. Thus the figure in question remains nameless. St. Panteleimon is preserved in his entire height, but the surface is very worn, with many *lacunae*. The saint, a physician from Nikomedeia,

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Nordhagen, *ibid.*, 87. John VII's addition to the decoration of the church is recorded in the *Liber Pontificalis*, vol. 1, ed. L. Duchesne (Paris, 1886), 385: “Basilicam itaque sanctae Dei genetricis qui Antiqua vocatur pictura decoravit, illicque ambonem noviter fecit et super eandem ecclesiam episcopium quantum ad se construere maluit, illicque pontificati sui tempus vitam finivit.” See A. Augenti, *Il Palatino nel medioevo* (Rome, 1996), 56–60; J. D. Breckenridge, “Evidence for the Nature of Relations between Pope John VII and the Byzantine Emperor Justinian II,” *BZ* 65 (1972): 364–74.

<sup>10</sup> Rushforth, “S. Maria Antiqua,” 77.

<sup>11</sup> “Acta Graeca S. Dometii Martyris,” *AB* 19 (1900): 310–13.

<sup>12</sup> For the shape of the surgeon's boxes held by several saints in the chapel, see Nordhagen's tracings in his “John VII,” pls. CXXVIII–CXXIX; Wilpert, *Mosaiken und Malereien*, pl. 145.2; Grüneisen, *Sainte-Marie-Antique*, fig. 75.

<sup>13</sup> Nordhagen, “John VII,” 58–59, pls. LXXIV, LXXV; Grüneisen, *Sainte-Marie-Antique*, fig. 129, pl. IC.LVI.

<sup>14</sup> Rushforth, “S. Maria Antiqua,” 78.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Grüneisen, *Sainte-Marie-Antique*, 164; Wilpert, *Mosaiken und Malereien*, 675.

wears a chlamys and tunic; he carries a scroll and a surgeon's box, which together with his beardless face are in keeping with the later Byzantine iconography of this saint.<sup>16</sup>

The last figure on the right is again preserved from head to foot, but the surface is largely damaged. The saint shows a tonsured head and short beard and wears the *paenula* of an ecclesiastic; he holds a small cross in his right hand, a surgeon's box in his left.<sup>17</sup> As only a small part of the inscription survives, the identity of the saint remains unclear.<sup>18</sup> The continuation of the frieze on the north wall<sup>19</sup> has a similar painted *velum* below, but is partly destroyed, in particular around and above the doorway to the west aisle. What remains is, on the left, the figure of a saint, identified by his accompanying inscription as St. John.<sup>20</sup> The figure is largely preserved, but the paint is very worn and damaged in many parts. The saint has rather voluminous hair, a moustache, and a short beard. He wears a cap, a tunic, and a cloak decorated with a pattern of white circles; he holds a scroll in his right hand, a surgeon's box in his left. Of the next figure on the right remain the head and the upper part of the right side (apart from a small area around the right foot). The accompanying inscription on the left names the saint as St. Celsus.<sup>21</sup> He shows a beardless face, dark hair, and has a band tied around his head; the saint wears tunic and pallium. Of the next figure to the right only parts of the head and the halo survive, but the saint is easily identified by the inscription as St. Abbakyros, an Alexandrian physician.<sup>22</sup> The figures to the right of this one are largely destroyed; what still can be seen is an unidentifiable inscription and, next on the right, small parts of a halo with the accompanying name of St. Kosmas. Of the last figure on the right, St. Damianos,<sup>23</sup> remain the name, the head and halo, the shoulders and chest, as well as some fragments of the lower part. The saint has short hair and beard, and wears a tunic and pallium. The east wall preserves only a fragment of an inscription, which according to P. J. Nordhagen's tracing belonged to a female saint, probably forming part of a frieze similar to those on the west and north walls.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Vita S. Panteleemonis*, PG 115:448–77; cf. Nordhagen, "John VII," 60. This is probably the earliest representation of St. Panteleimon to have survived. Closest in time comes a fresco at Hagios Stephanos, Kastoria, where the saint also carries a surgeon's box, though of a different shape. The painting has been assigned to the mid-9th century; S. Pelekanides and M. Chatzidakis, *Kastoria* (Athens, 1985), 10, 15, fig. 5. Compare also a mosaic in the naos of Hosios Loukas: E. Diez and O. Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece* (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), fig. 23. Cappella Palatina: E. Kitzinger, *I mosaici del periodo Normanno in Sicilia*, vol. 1 (Palermo, 1994), fig. 123. See also a 12th-century fresco at Hagioi Anargyroi, Kastoria; S. Pelekanides, *Kastoria* (Thessalonike, 1953), pl. 26b.

<sup>17</sup> Nordhagen, "John VII," 60.

<sup>18</sup> For the various readings of the remaining letters, see Nordhagen, *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Grüneisen, *Sainte-Marie-Antique*, 164, fig. 128; Nordhagen, "John VII," pl. LXXI.b; Wilpert, *Mosaiken und Malereien*, pl. 145.1.

<sup>20</sup> St. John Anargyros, fellow martyr of St. Abbakyros. The type and iconography in later Byzantine art differs considerably from this early representation: compare, e.g., a 12th-century fresco at Hagioi Anargyroi, Kastoria; Pelekanides, *Kastoria*, pl. 22a. See also a mosaic at Monreale; Kitzinger, *Mosaici*, 3: pls. 233, 237.

<sup>21</sup> As Rushforth pointed out, this is probably not Celsus of Milan, fellow martyr of Nazarius, but Celsus of Antioch; Rushforth, "S. Maria Antiqua," 78.

<sup>22</sup> This inscription was, although only fragmentary, much more distinct when Wilpert's watercolor was done than it is today.

<sup>23</sup> The holy physicians Kosmas and Damianos were already popular in Rome much earlier, as their church on the Forum, dating from 526–530, shows, but during the Byzantine period several new churches in Rome were dedicated to the two brothers; cf. Rushforth, "S. Maria Antiqua," 79.

<sup>24</sup> Nordhagen, "John VII," 63, pl. CXVII.22. The east wall might have once contained a row of female medical saints; cf. J. David in Grüneisen, *Sainte-Marie-Antique*, 484–85.

The south wall contains a large rectangular niche starting at floor level (Fig. 4).<sup>25</sup> Painted on its rear wall is a frieze of five saints with an ornamented border consisting of interlaced circles at the bottom and a small *velum* forming the lowest decorated strip. The inscriptions are set into a narrow strip above the saints' haloes, forming thus a decorated zone of their own and emphasizing the strict horizontal order of the compositional scheme. This is the only part of the badly damaged painting that is almost entirely preserved, giving the name of each saint depicted below. The only figure to have survived in large part is the saint on the extreme left, St. Kosmas (Fig. 5).<sup>26</sup> The surface is rather rubbed; the feet are lost, but there are several well-preserved parts as well as quite a few *lacunae*. The saint has short hair, beard and moustache of a reddish color; he wears a tunic and a purplish pallium. The eyes are large, almost round and have a solemn expression, framed by arched eyebrows and strongly rendered lower lids. The nose is thin and casts a shadow on its left side, the lips are rather strong and prominent, the chin small. It is a strikingly thin and elongated, markedly ascetic face of a greenish color which is more successful in giving the idea of an underlying bone structure than is the case with most of the other saints' faces in the chapel. On the forehead, above the right eye, is a distinct horizontal shadow, which adds to the vividness of the expression. The right hand holds a white scroll, tied with a dark band. The left hand, covered by the pallium, obviously holds the surgeon's box, which is seen from its right side, with a long carrying strap pointing upwards. It is of a dark, reddish-brown color and represents the best-preserved example of its kind in the chapel.<sup>27</sup>

Of the next figure, St. Abbakyros, marginal parts of the halo and most of the body survive, but very worn and with many *lacunae*. This saint, too, wears a purplish pallium. The saint on his right, St. Stephen, remains only in parts of the halo and a fragment of the body with the right hand holding a censer, as well as part of a long white garment.<sup>28</sup> Of St. Prokopios, the next on the right, nothing but the upper contour of the halo is left.<sup>29</sup> The last saint on the extreme right is St. Damianos, but there are only very worn parts of the halo and the head and traces of a purplish garment in the lower part still distinguishable.

<sup>25</sup> The recess is 2.57 m high, 1.91 m wide, and 0.22 m deep; Nordhagen, "John VII," 64.

<sup>26</sup> Grüneisen, *Sainte-Marie-Antique*, 163, fig. 125. For the iconography of Sts. Kosmas and Damianos, see the Justinianic apse mosaic in their church on the Forum; Wilpert, *Mosaiken und Malereien*, pls. 102–7. For a middle Byzantine representation, see the 12th-century frescoes at Hagioi Anargyroi, Kastoria; Pelekanides, *Kastoria*, pl. 12. See also Monreale: Kitzinger, *Mosaici*, 3: pls. 230–31, 234–35. Hosios Loukas, narthex: Diez and Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics*, fig. 52.

<sup>27</sup> Judging from Nordhagen's tracings of other surgeon's boxes carried by saints in the chapel, the one described here is of the same type as the ones held by the unidentified saints (nos. 4 and 6 in Nordhagen's catalogue) on the west wall. They are also carried in the same fashion, always with the left hand; Nordhagen, "John VII," pls. CXXVIII.9,12 and CXXIX.13. The apse mosaic at SS Cosma e Damiano on the Forum shows a surgeon's box of a different type carried by St. Damianos (a similar one presumably once held by St. Kosmas did not survive the repeated restorations). Being comparatively schematic, it is red, rectangular, and decorated with a white cross.

<sup>28</sup> Compare the middle Byzantine fresco at Hagioi Anargyroi, Kastoria, where the saint is wearing a similar long-sleeved white garment; Pelekanides, *Kastoria*, pl. 13b. Daphni, naos: Diez and Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics*, fig. 77.

<sup>29</sup> For the later iconography of this saint, see a fresco at Hagioi Anargyroi, Kastoria, where the saint is depicted as a soldier; Pelekanides, *Kastoria*, pl. 23b. The mosaic in the naos of Hosios Loukas shows him as a warrior, too: Diez and Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics*, fig. 36. See also a medallion in the Cappella Palatina; Kitzinger, *Mosaici*, 1: fig. 81.

A fragment of paint in the lower left corner extending from the niche onto the surrounding wall led Nordhagen to the conclusion that the decoration of the niche was in some way connected with paintings once covering the entire south wall of which, however, nothing survives.<sup>30</sup>

#### THE TOPOGRAPHY OF THE SITE

The chapel has in its special dedication to medical saints no surviving counterparts. A somewhat comparable structure might have been the Chapel of St. Febronia in the Church of St. John Prodromos at Constantinople, known from the seventh-century miracles of St. Artemios, another medical saint. That chapel was, according to Cyril Mango's reconstruction, located to the right of the apse and the main altar of the church—similar to the situation of the Chapel of Physicians at S. Maria Antiqua—and dedicated to a medical saint treating female patients, acting as a kind of assistant to St. Artemios.<sup>31</sup> The considerable deviation from the usual function of a *diakonikon* as a vestry or repository for scriptures—obvious in the Chapel of Physicians—has, too, a parallel there. There have been attempts to explain the meaning and purpose of the chapel's iconographic program in the context of the location of S. Maria Antiqua. Eva Tea in 1937 suggested a kind of medical shrine at S. Maria Antiqua and linked the Christian building to the preceding pagan monuments on the same site or in the immediate vicinity and their documented healing cults: the Lacus Iuturnae, a healing well within the precinct of the Roman deity Juturna, formed part of the area where S. Maria Antiqua was later established, and the Temple of Castor and Pollux, in the immediate neighborhood, was also the site of a healing cult.<sup>32</sup> Tea understood this as the continuous specific dedication of a sacred place from ancient times.<sup>33</sup> John Osborne, too, explained the prominence of medical saints in the decoration of S. Maria Antiqua with a replacement of the cult of Juturna<sup>34</sup> by a Christian healing cult.<sup>35</sup> However, the medical theme appears not to be a feature of the earliest strata of decoration at S. Maria Antiqua.<sup>36</sup> It cannot be traced back beyond the mid-seventh century, and the cult of the medical saints seems to have reached the peak of its popularity only with the decorations commissioned by John VII and Paul I during the first half of the eighth century.

<sup>30</sup> Nordhagen, "John VII," 64.

<sup>31</sup> C. Mango, "On the History of the Templon and the Martyrion of St. Artemios at Constantinople," *Zograf* 10 (1979): 41–42, plan fig. 1; see also V. S. Crisafulli and J. W. Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St. Artemios* (Leiden, 1997), 13–14, 140–44 (miracle 24), 198–99 (miracle 38), 222–25 (miracle 45). P. Maas, "Artemioskult in Konstantinopel," *BNJ* 1 (1920): 377–80.

<sup>32</sup> Tea, *Basilica*, 48–54. On the same matter, see more recently J. Aronen, "La sopravvivenza dei culti pagani e la topografia cristiana dell'area di Giuturna e delle sue adiacenze," in E. M. Steinby, ed., *Lacus Iuturnae*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1989), 148–74. L. Deubner, "Juturna und die Ausgrabungen auf dem Römischen Forum," *Neue Jahrbücher* 9 (1902): 370–88; E. Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, vol. 2 (London, 1968), 9–17. The cult of the Dioskuroi in Rome evidently involved incubation; see Deubner, "Juturna," 384 f; idem, *Kosmas und Damian* (Leipzig, 1907), 56.

<sup>33</sup> Tea, *Basilica*, 48–54.

<sup>34</sup> Among the excavation material surfaced a statue of Asklepios, who was evidently worshiped at Juturna's shrine; Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian*, 56; Nash, *Ancient Rome*, 2:9.

<sup>35</sup> Osborne, "Atrium," 207.

<sup>36</sup> I am referring to the "Maria Regina" layer on the "Palimpsest Wall" and the subsequent 6th- and early 7th-century paintings of the first apsidal decoration. Admittedly, the scarce remains of the early frescoes do not permit one to exclude the possibility of the Anargyroi having been depicted in some way already at that stage; cf. P. J. Nordhagen, "The Earliest Decorations in Santa Maria Antiqua and Their Date," *Acta IRN* 1 (1962): 53–72.

But apart from the ancient association of the area with pagan healing cults, a contemporaneous link of the church of S. Maria Antiqua with the local care for the sick is evident from the seventh century on. The apse wall of the church borders an area of mostly brick masonry, excavated between 1903 and 1912, the Horrea Agrippiana. The *horrea* complex—identified by a dedicatory inscription found there *in situ*—occupies the space exactly between S. Maria Antiqua, the slope of the Palatine hill, and the rotunda of S. Teodoro (Figs. 2, 6, view of *horrea* toward Palatine; Fig. 7, view toward S. Maria Antiqua).<sup>37</sup> The originally late Republican buildings of the *horrea* seem to have been used by the eighth century by the *diaconiae* of S. Maria Antiqua and S. Teodoro.<sup>38</sup> The taking over of late Classical structures, for example granaries like the Horrea Agrippiana, by the Church is documented from the sixth and seventh centuries onwards when these areas eventually were owned by the Church and frequently used as *diaconiae*.<sup>39</sup> The *diaconiae* were welfare institutions of a monastic character. They first appear in Western sources under Benedict II (684–705) and received subsidies until 731.<sup>40</sup>

Archaeological evidence, however, points to a foundation date of several Roman *diaconiae* already around 600, among them the *diaconia* of S. Maria Antiqua.<sup>41</sup> S. Teodoro was probably built about the same time as the oratory of its *diaconia*.<sup>42</sup> The institution has mostly, but not undisputedly, been recognized as a monastic importation from the Byzantine East.<sup>43</sup> Most important for our case is the fact that the *diaconiae* apparently of-

<sup>37</sup> R. Krautheimer, *CBCR*, vol. 4 (Vatican City, 1970), 283–86, figs. 232–34; H. Bauer, “Un Tentativo di ricostruzione degli Horrea Agrippiana,” *ArchCl* 30 (1978): 132–46; idem with A. Pronti, “Elementi architettonici degli Horrea Agrippiana,” *ArchCl* 30 (1978): 107–31; A. Bartoli, “Gli Horrea Agrippiana e la diaconia di S. Teodoro,” *MonAnt* 27 (1921): 374–402; M. Berucci, “L’architettura degli Horrea Agrippiana,” *Palladio* 4 (1954): 145–49.

<sup>38</sup> R. Hermes, “Die stadtrömischen Diakonien,” *RQ* 91 (1996): 35, 52; see also *ibid.* for the general character of the *diaconiae* in early medieval Rome and their significance for the welfare system of the city. Cf. F. Astolfi, F. Guidobaldi, and A. Pronti, “Horrea Agrippiana,” *ArchCl* 30 (1978): 86; Krautheimer, *Profile*, 77–78. For the dates and documents regarding the first *diaconiae* in Italy, see Th. Sternberg, “Der vermeintliche Ursprung der westlichen Diakonien in Ägypten und die Conlationes des Johannes Cassian,” *JbAC* 31 (1988): 173–209, esp. 205–6, fig. 4, with a survey plan of the *diaconiae* in early medieval Rome.

<sup>39</sup> Krautheimer, *CBCR* 4:287; Bartoli, “Horrea Agrippiana,” 401. Hermes, “Diakonien,” 35, 49.

<sup>40</sup> G. Ferrari, *Early Roman Monasteries* (Vatican City, 1957), 355–56; see also H.-I. Marrou, “L’origine orientale des diaconies romaines,” *MélRome* 57 (1940): 99, and Sternberg, “Ursprung der westlichen Diakonien,” 205. On possible connections between the cult of medical saints and welfare institutions of this kind in Rome, cf. Sinthern, “Abbacyrus,” 220.

<sup>41</sup> Krautheimer, *Profile*, 77, 81, 341. The “*diaconia Antiqua*” or “*diaconia* . . . Dei genetricis quae appellatur Antiqua” is later mentioned four times receiving donations during the papacy of Leo III (795–816); *Liber Pontificalis*, 2:12, 14, 19, 26. According to J. Lestocquoy, “Administration de Rome et diaconies du VIIe au XIIe siècle,” *RACr* 7 (1930): 296, the *diaconia* of S. Maria Antiqua was probably installed in the former “Atrium Minervae”; see also C. Bertelli, *La Madonna di S. Maria in Trastevere* (Rome, 1961), 52–56.

<sup>42</sup> According to Krautheimer’s analysis, only the apse of the present building is late antique; Krautheimer, *CBCR* 4:279–88. The church is not mentioned before the late 8th century: cod. Einsidlensis 326 fols. 81v–82: “ad scm theodorum”; C. Huelsen, “La Pianta di Roma dell’Anonimo Einsidlense,” *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 9 (1907): 28, pl. III. Its connection with a *diaconia* is recorded two times during the papacy of Leo III (795–816): “*diaconia sancti Theodori*”; *Liber Pontificalis*, vol. 2 (ed. Duchesne), 12, 21. For oratories and their association with hospitals and *xenodocheia*, see Th. Sternberg, *Orientalium More Secutus*, *JbAC*, suppl. 16 (Münster, 1991), 174–77. See also E. Monaco, “Ricerche sotto la diaconia di S. Teodoro,” *Rend-PontAcc* 45 (1972–73), 223–41; Hermes, “Diakonien,” 52; Krautheimer, *Profile*, 78.

<sup>43</sup> Marrou, “Origine,” 100; Sternberg recently discussed the relationship between Egyptian and later Roman and Italian *diaconiae* again and challenged Marrou’s hypothesis of an Egyptian origin of the Western institution; cf. Sternberg, “Ursprung der westlichen Diakonien,” 173–209, esp. 205–9; see also Ferrari, *Monasteries*, 356. According to Sinthern, a monastery populated by Greek monks perhaps existed next to the part of

ten served as hospitals, asylums, and hospices for pilgrims.<sup>44</sup> A seventh- or early eighth-century letter advises the administrator of a Roman hospice to “zealously prepare their beds, with bedclothes, to receive the sick and needy, and provide them with care and all necessities; an annual ration of oil for the sick and poor, and anything else their sickness requires. Provide also doctors and nursing.”<sup>45</sup> This document testifies to the fact that at the latest around 700 the *diaconiae* could assume the function of hospitals, but at the same time retained their status as a general welfare institution.

The *diaconia* of S. Maria Antiqua has left its traces in the decorational and architectural scheme of the church. The hypothesis that this *diaconia* served in particular the care for the sick is supported by the imagery in the church. While in the *prothesis* the administrator of the *diaconia*, Theodotus—a lay official of the papal civil service who repeatedly features in the paintings—installed a private chapel,<sup>46</sup> its counterpart on the other side of the presbytery, the *diakonikon*, reflects the specific dedication of the institution: the decoration celebrates medical saints, and its function is in all likelihood to be seen in the context of the *diaconia*. Parts of the *horrea* complex presumably used by the *diaconia* even border on the chapel’s south wall. Although no documentary proof has surfaced so far, I am inclined to take the iconographic program of the Chapel of Physicians as key evidence for the suggested use of the adjacent *diaconia* as a hospital. This might apply either to the *diaconia* of S. Maria Antiqua or to that of S. Teodoro, or indeed to both of them. All this leads to the conclusion that the installation of a cult of Eastern medical saints at S. Maria Antiqua was probably not merely due to the ancient connotation of the site, but also had its cause in a predominantly Byzantine environment: the administration on the Palatine, the emergence of a Byzantine quarter, the wave of immigrants from Egypt in the seventh century, and the specific dedication of the nearby *diaconiae*.<sup>47</sup>

#### THE IMAGERY

In looking at the decoration outside the chapel, medical saints are encountered throughout the church. St. Euthymios, whose head is preserved in a fragmentary medal-

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S. Maria Antiqua that faces the Capitoline Hill, built into the area of the former “Templum Divi Augusti”; Sinthern, “Abbacyrus,” 217.

<sup>44</sup> Krautheimer, *Profile*, 77, 81. Zacharias mentions two hospitals in Rome in the 7th century; cf. C. L. Urlichs, *Codex Urbis Romae Topographicus* (Würzburg, 1871), 49–50. The *xenon* near St. Anastasia’s in Constantinople clearly served as a hospital, as is evident from an account in the miracles of St. Artemios; Crisafulli and Nesbitt, *Miracles*, 8, 130–31 (miracle 22). See also Sternberg, *Orientalium*, 160–67, on the connection between monastery and hospital in general. Sternberg gives an outline of the organization of a church with an adjacent hospice at Wadi Natrun. For the extent of medical knowledge of the monks and the actual presence of medical and botanical treatises like Dioscorides’ *Herbarium* in monasteries, see Sternberg, *ibid.*, 166, who points out Cassiodorus’s suggestion, that the monks in his monastery should read the works of Hippocrates and Galen in Latin translations, which implies quite a range of medical knowledge (Cassiodorus, *Institutiones*, 29, PL 70:1143). See also A. Philipsborn, “Les premiers hopitaux au Moyen Age,” *La Nouvelle Clío* 6 (1954 = *Mélanges Roger Goossens*): 137–63. Marrou, “Origine,” 96; G. Lugli, “La trasformazione di Roma pagana in Roma cristiana,” *RendLinc* 4 (1949): 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Liber Diurnus*, form. 46; trans. P. Llewellyn, *Rome in the Dark Ages* (London, 1970), 116; cf. Krautheimer, *Profile*, 81.

<sup>46</sup> H. Belting, “Eine Privatkapelle im frühmittelalterlichen Rom,” *DOP* 41 (1987): 55–69; Krautheimer, *Profile*, 104. On the supervision of these institutions by a *pater diaconiae* in general, see Krautheimer, *ibid.*, 77.

<sup>47</sup> The Byzantine administration used the palace on the Palatine throughout the 7th and in the early 8th century; Krautheimer, *CBCR* 2:269.



lion on the facade of the Oratory of the Forty Martyrs, is a saint with the reputation of performing healing miracles, as is St. Blasios, to be found in the passageway to the “*Templum Divi Augusti*.”<sup>48</sup> The saints on the facade of the oratory date from the time of John VII and thus are contemporaneous with the frescoes in the chapel. But already at an earlier period the healing theme held a prominent position in the church: the southwest pillar of the nave preserves two saints holding surgeon’s boxes. One of them is likely to be St. Panteleimon,<sup>49</sup> here again next to another medical saint wearing a pallium, as in the *diakonikon*. The shape of the surgeon’s boxes with “ears” and carrying straps is the same as encountered in John VII’s decoration. The frescoed southeast column of the nave shows Christ’s Healing of a Blind Man, the only one of Christ’s healing miracles to be depicted in the church.<sup>50</sup> The paintings in the nave have been ascribed to the mid-seventh century and thus antedate the decoration of the chapel at least by half a century. Evidently, the healing theme already featured at S. Maria Antiqua a few decades after the installation of the two adjacent *diaconiae*, long before Pope John VII embellished the *diakonikon* with frescoes. How these pictures were perceived and what particular role the imagery in the chapel played within the cult, regarding the special needs of the sick taking part in it, remain open questions.

Adolf Weis and more recently Hans Belting have pointed out that several of the paintings are to be understood as icons, reproduced in fresco technique.<sup>51</sup> The originals are likely to have been venerable and famous icons on panel, whereas the copies, commissioned by private donors, were set into areas easily accessible for worship, either in a separate private chapel or in more open parts of the church. The best-known examples are the crucifixion in the Chapel of Theodotus and the Virgin and Child in a small open chapel on the right side of the nave.<sup>52</sup> Belting has convincingly argued that the monumental crucifixion scene in the large rectangular niche cut into the south wall of the Theodotus Chapel reproduces a well-known composition encountered several times on eighth-century icons from the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai and ultimately going back to a highly venerated image in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.<sup>53</sup> The icon in the *prothesis* of S. Maria Antiqua, inserted into a preexisting niche, was a cult image in front of which candles could be put on a sill. Belting’s analysis of the character of the central image in the Theodotus Chapel is significant for the problem dealt with here, because it sheds light on a similar situation encountered in the slightly older

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Aronen, “Sopravvivenza,” 152.

<sup>49</sup> P. J. Nordhagen, “S. Maria Antiqua: The Frescoes of the Seventh Century,” *Acta IRNorv* 8 (1978): 124–26, fig. 10, pls. LIV.a, b; Wilpert, *Mosaiken und Malereien*, pl. 145.2.

<sup>50</sup> Grüneisen, *Sainte-Marie-Antique*, 107, figs. 81, 81A; Nordhagen, “Seventh Century,” 128–30, fig. 11 (tracing), pl. LV.

<sup>51</sup> Weis, “Ikonentypus,” 32; Belting, “Privatkapelle,” 58.

<sup>52</sup> Belting gives a plan of the distribution of the votive icons in the church; Belting, “Privatkapelle,” 59.

<sup>53</sup> Belting, *ibid.*, 58. Note in particular the Palestinian type of Christ wearing a purple colobium; cf. K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons*, vol. 1 (Princeton, N.J., 1976), B.36. Moreover, there are several links between the paintings in S. Maria Antiqua and the Sinai icons, such as the head of Christ in the crucifixion of John VII’s apse decoration, which is an example of Nordhagen’s rare “Type B” Christ with short curly hair and beard; see Nordhagen, “John VII,” 53. This type is also encountered in the Sinai icons; compare Weitzmann, *Icons*, B.6. See also Kitzinger, “On Some Icons,” 137, figs. 4, 5, who points out the striking stylistic and iconographic resemblance of the fresco-icon of St. Demetrios at S. Maria Antiqua and the saint to the left of the Virgin on an encaustic icon from Mt. Sinai, who is thus identified as St. Demetrios (Weitzmann, *Icons*, B.3).

Chapel of Physicians. As in the *prothesis*, we have a large rectangular niche in the south wall of the chapel (Fig. 4). Despite the fact that traces of paint might indicate a connection between the painted niche and a lost overall decoration of the south wall, the composition and the broad white frame with black borders—which is similar to the one of the icon in the *prothesis*—show it to be a self-sufficient, complete picture of its own. Moreover, the *velum* can only be part of the picture itself, since it is much smaller than the ones encountered in the lower zone of the west and north walls of the chapel. The fresco is, in fact, unmistakably to be regarded as an icon which again is set in a crucial position within the chapel and provided with a sill to light candles in front of the image.<sup>54</sup> The icon of the five saints—Kosmas and Damianos flanking Abbakynos, Stephen, and Prokopios—reflects beyond doubt a famous model, since it was the center of worship in the chapel, occupying the most significant place.<sup>55</sup>

Again, one has to look east for the image the composition ultimately goes back to. This is implied by the Eastern origin of the saints, their importance in Byzantine hagiology, and by the Greek inscriptions. As in the *prothesis*, the Sinai icons seem to provide a clue for the origin of the icon in the *diakonikon* of S. Maria Antiqua. The right wing of a triptych in the Old Library at St. Catherine's monastery shows the standing figure of St. Damianos, wearing a long purple tunic and a brown *himation* and holding an oblong white object in both hands, the left being covered by the garment (Fig. 8, right).<sup>56</sup> This object, which Kurt Weitzmann believed to be an instrument box, has in fact exactly the same shape as the scroll held by St. Kosmas in the Chapel of Physicians—even the purple band tied around it can be seen in both paintings. Since the shape of a surgeon's box is quite different and familiar from several figures in S. Maria Antiqua, as well as from another fragment of the same triptych (Fig. 8, left) and other icons from Sinai,<sup>57</sup> it is clear that in both cases a scroll is depicted. It cannot be told from the worn surface of the triptych leaf whether there was in addition a surgeon's box carried by the saint, but this is quite likely. A surviving fragment of paint in the lower part of the extreme right of the fresco-icon in the chapel shows that St. Damianos there, too, wears a long purple garment. Weitzmann, on stylistic grounds, assigned the encaustic plaque at St. Catherine's to the seventh century. A hole in the upper left, obviously meant to receive a dowel, shows that it was the right wing of a triptych.<sup>58</sup> The left wing, of course, must have shown St. Kosmas. A fragment of the center panel (the left part, identified as such by a hole in the upper left corner) shows St. John (Anargyros) carrying a surgeon's box, accompanied by his name in vertical script (Fig. 8, left).

<sup>54</sup> Rushforth suggested that the recess in the wall once might have contained sacred books, vessels, and vestments. That would be in keeping with the usual function of a *diakonikon* as a sacristy, but the idea has to be abandoned, since the niche was obviously made to receive the fresco-icon and would, in fact, have not been sufficiently deep enough to have any scriptures or liturgical objects stored in it; Rushforth, "S. Maria Antiqua," 77.

<sup>55</sup> Entering the chapel from the west aisle, as the early medieval visitor would have done, one faces the south wall with the niche.

<sup>56</sup> Weitzmann, *Icons*, B.18. The saint is identified by a Greek inscription on the top part of the panel. The large letters on dark crimson ground filling a broad strip above the halo of the saint create a zone quite similar to that giving the names of each saint in the niche at S. Maria Antiqua. The surface of the paint is very worn, in particular in the center, and the lower half of the face is rubbed off.

<sup>57</sup> Compare Weitzmann, *ibid.*, B.55, 10th century.

<sup>58</sup> A corresponding hole in the lower left must have been located in a part of the panel that has splintered off. The back shows, according to Weitzmann's description, part of a simple cross, the other half of which must have been on the lost left wing; Weitzmann, *Icons*, 44.

Returning to the fresco at S. Maria Antiqua, this may in turn give a hint as to the subject of the missing parts of the central leaf of the Sinai triptych. The similarities go beyond iconographic details: the style of the very fine, sharply brushed folds of St. Damianos's tunic which seem to radiate from the saint's head on the Sinai icon comes quite close to the manner in which the folds of St. Kosmas's tunic in the chapel are rendered, as is evident from the fairly well preserved right upper part of this figure. The dense linear pattern of gold striation on the saint's himation in the Sinai icon can be compared with the very fine and densely set folds of St. Kosmas's pallium at S. Maria Antiqua. As in the triptych, we find St. Damianos on the extreme right of the fresco-icon, and as St. Kosmas is on the left flanking the central group of figures in the fresco, so he was doubtless depicted on the lost left wing of the triptych. The central panel of the Sinai triptych probably showed a row of perhaps three medical saints of whom only the figure of St. John is preserved. This gives at least an idea of the model for the fresco icon in S. Maria Antiqua. It probably also originated in seventh-century Egypt or Palestine, like the Sinai panel.<sup>59</sup> That this kind of triptych was not uncommon is shown by another, later Palestinian icon of St. Kosmas at Sinai, being the left wing of a triptych, the other parts of which are lost.<sup>60</sup> Thus the composition to which the fresco-icon in S. Maria Antiqua reverts might in fact have been a triptych that was—naturally, being reproduced in a fresco—adapted to a composition for a single panel, still retaining the symmetry of the flanking brothers Kosmas and Damianos, who in the case of an original single panel are likely to have been depicted next to each other, just as they are in the fresco on the chapel's north wall, opposite the icon.

#### INCUBATION

But what was the precise function of the chapel? The idea of incubation having been practiced at S. Maria Antiqua, though not ruled out, has always met with reservation.<sup>61</sup> The character of this cult in ancient Greece is well documented in the *iamata* of Epidaurios: sick people came to the shrine of Asklepios in order to spend a night in the *abaton* where they expected the god to reveal to them the means to a cure in a dream oracle or to cure them straightaway.<sup>62</sup> The practice is known to have been taken over by Christianity in the cult of Sts. Kosmas and Damianos as well as Sts. Abbakynos and John in Asia Minor and Egypt—but not in Italy.<sup>63</sup> But, given the fact that the church of S. Maria Antiqua is Byzantine in plan and decoration, being frequented by a Greek community, the import of another Eastern cult form—namely, incubation—seems not implausible, despite the lack of written evidence. This is in particular true of the *diakonikon*, since the cult of the class of

<sup>59</sup> For the place of origin and the date of the St. Damianos panel, see Weitzmann, *ibid.*, 42–43, B.16 and B.17.

<sup>60</sup> Weitzmann, *ibid.*, B.47, front. The tubular object held by the saint in his left hand is not, as Weitzmann suggested, a surgeon's box, but again a scroll, as is evident when compared to the various surgeon's boxes in S. Maria Antiqua.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Aronen, "Sopravvivenza," 153 with note 50.

<sup>62</sup> For the testimonies and their interpretation, see L. and E. Edelstein, *Asclepius*, 2 vols. (Baltimore, Md., 1945).

<sup>63</sup> But already Deubner considered the possibility of an incubation cult in Rome; Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian*, 56, 73; cf. Sinthern, "Abbacyrus," 208. See also Sophronios, *SS. Cyri et Ioannis Miracula*, PG 87.3:3559–62. On the structural similarities in the miracle stories from Epidaurios and those of the Constantinopolitan saint Artemios whose cult featured incubation, see J. Tolstoi, "Un poncif aréatalogique dans les Miracles d'Asklépios et d'Artémios," *Byzantion* 3 (1926): 53–63.

saints depicted in the chapel was traditionally linked to this practice: in fact, an introduction of the saints, but not of their most conspicuous cult feature, seems rather unlikely. If incubation was ever performed at S. Maria Antiqua, an obvious location would thus have been the Chapel of Physicians, which, however, apart from the subject of its decoration, does not seem to provide evidence for that.

But there is one at first glance inexplicable oddity about the main cult image of the chapel—the icon in the niche of the south wall: all other frescoed niches throughout the church which presumably reproduce venerable icons are cut into the wall at eye level, in order to be easily accessible for a donor offering votive gifts or lighting candles in front of the images. But the niche in the south wall of the Chapel of Physicians starts at floor level (Fig. 4): there is no obvious explanation at hand for this peculiarity, which means that a person wishing to put a candle on the sill of the niche actually had to get down on the floor in order to do so. This is all the more remarkable, as the niche does not belong to the pre-existing ancient building—contrary to the situation in the Theodotus Chapel—but evidently was cut into the wall contemporaneously with John VII's decoration,<sup>64</sup> beyond doubt to receive the icon it contains. But, in imagining an incubation cult in the chapel, the strange position of the icon immediately makes sense: it enabled the pious sick, spending the night on the floor of the chapel, to gaze at the cult image which was illuminated by the lamps or candles they lit in front of it, on the sill of the niche, only just above floor level. The resulting perspective when looking up from the floor toward the image would thus have resembled that of a real encounter—or one experienced in a dream.

The suggestiveness of a carefully chosen setting for an icon is a factor that has to be taken into account here. As the figures are almost life-size, which adds to the effect, the composition of the original panel painting must have been considerably enlarged in the fresco.<sup>65</sup> The virtual presence of a saint in an icon, as conceived by the Byzantine beholder, would have been particularly relevant in the context of a procedure such as incubation, where the worshiper seeks advice from the saint in a dream oracle that involves the actual appearance of the invoked.<sup>66</sup> The way in which the icon worked for the pious seems in fact comparable to the way cult statues of Asklepios or Sarapis were perceived in antiquity. Kallistratos gives an idea of this in the *Descriptiones*: "Are we then to believe that the vessel Argo, which was wrought by the hands of Athena and later assumed its allotted place among the stars, became capable of speech, and yet in the case of a statue into which Asclepius infused his own powers, introducing purposeful intelligence therein and thus making it a partner with himself, not believe that the power of the indwelling god is clearly manifest therein?"<sup>67</sup>

The same idea of presence in an image is evident in a miracle of Sts. Kosmas and Damianos, where a certain Constantine, who is said to carry an image of the Anargyroi with him whenever going on a journey, tells his wife about the saints after she had experienced a vision of them in a dream.

<sup>64</sup> Krautheimer, *CBCR* 2:264; Rushforth, "S. Maria Antiqua," 76.

<sup>65</sup> The figures on the icon are approximately 1.60 m high and thus—although much closer to the beholder—slightly larger than the saints on the west wall which measure 1.50 m; Nordhagen, "John VII," 56, 64.

<sup>66</sup> On the relationship between image and prototype, see Kitzinger, "On Some Icons," 142–43, 144 with note 51.

<sup>67</sup> Kallistratos, *Descriptiones*, 10, "On the Statue of Paean"; trans. Edelstein, *Asclepius*, 1:343–44, T. 627.

At Laodicea he married a woman who soon thereafter developed a pain in her jaw. Forgetting that he had the icon with him, Constantine was at a loss what to do. The following night she fell asleep and saw these great and awesome physicians . . . Cosmas and Damian standing by her bed in the form in which they are depicted and saying to her, "Why are you afflicted? Why are you causing distress to your husband? We are here with you. Do not worry. . . ." When she awoke, she questioned her husband, wishing to learn from him the appearance of the glorious Saints Cosmas and Damian, i.e. how they are depicted and in what manner they manifest themselves to the sick. The husband explained to her their appearance and related the blessings they confer. . . . The story made him remember that he had in the wallet he carried under his arm a representation of the saints on an image and, taking it out, he immediately showed it to his wife. When she saw it, she offered obeisance and realized that indeed the Saints were present with them as they had said.<sup>68</sup>

That the idea of the indwelling salutary powers of an image was actually taken quite literally is evident from another miracle of Sts. Kosmas and Damianos, where a patient takes particles from a fresco internally and afterwards has a vision of the saints.

This story concerns a woman who had been healed of various diseases by Sts. Cosmas and Damian. She depicted them on all the walls of her house, being as she was insatiable in her desire of seeing them. . . . The woman then develops a bad case of colic and happens to be left alone in her house. Perceiving herself to be in danger, she crawled out of bed and, upon reaching the place where these most wise Saints were depicted on the wall, she stood up leaning on her faith as upon a stick and scraped off with her fingernails some plaster. This she put into water and, after drinking the mixture, she was immediately cured of her pains by the visitation of the Saints.<sup>69</sup>

Significantly, the woman treats the particles of paint just like an ordinary *pharmakon*: before actually swallowing them, she dissolves them in water.

Considering the attitude toward images evident from the two stories and the presence of the medical saints in the reproduction of a famous (presumably miracle-working) icon, the Chapel of Physicians at S. Maria Antiqua seems quite well equipped for an incubation cult performed by a Greek community in early eighth-century Rome, especially regarding the sick cared for in the adjacent *diaconiae* of S. Maria Antiqua and S. Teodoro. Referring to Mango's inclusion of a *xenon* in his reconstruction of the *martyrion* of St. Artemios at Constantinople, John Nesbitt recently questioned the probability of a hospital in the proximity of a church where incubation was performed, as the incubants would normally have been people who had already received treatment by doctors.<sup>70</sup> I would rather follow Mango here, since there is no need to see a pronounced opposition of healing cult and hospital. St. Artemios's miracle stories express, it is true, some hostility toward doctors, but more often than not the dream oracles describe settings and actions clearly derived from the medical sphere.<sup>71</sup> This is true to an even larger extent of the miracles of Sts. Kosmas and Damianos, who themselves were physicians.<sup>72</sup> At S. Maria Antiqua, as elsewhere, the

<sup>68</sup> Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian*, 132ff, Miracle 13; trans. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972), 138–39.

<sup>69</sup> Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian*, 137f, Miracle 15; trans. Mango, *Byzantine Empire*, 139; cf. Kitzinger, "Cult of Images," 107 with note 89.

<sup>70</sup> Mango, "Templon," 41–42, fig. 1; Crisafulli and Nesbitt, *Miracles*, 11–12.

<sup>71</sup> See miracles 24, 42, 44 in Crisafulli and Nesbitt, *ibid.*, 143, 216–23.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. J. Haldon in Crisafulli and Nesbitt, *ibid.*, 44.

*diaconia* with its postulated hospital was run by the Church, and possibly the same administration and clerics were in charge of both institutions. There is no reason to dismiss the possibility that hospital care and healing cult were in fact closely linked, in particular considering the semi-ecclesiastical, multifunctional character of the Roman *diaconiae*.

But yet another image in the chapel may be examined in support of this argument. There is one enigmatic figure that has always puzzled those dealing with the iconography of the frescoes: the nameless, dark-complexioned saint in classical costume on the west wall between Sts. Dometios and Panteleimon (Figs. 3, 9). As already mentioned, there is no inscription relating to this figure, while the name "Panteleimon" on the right belongs to the next saint on that side. Nordhagen's proposition that the figure in question might represent St. Hermolaos, another medical saint and Panteleimon's teacher and fellow martyr, seems problematic.<sup>73</sup> The type of the figure in the chapel does not at all correspond to that of Hermolaos in later Byzantine art, where this saint is shown as an old man with white hair and pointed beard, as can be seen in a tenth-century icon from Mount Sinai, a twelfth-century fresco at Kastoria, and a mosaic in Monreale.<sup>74</sup> The dark-haired saint in the chapel wearing classical garments and carrying a scroll and a surgeon's box clearly shows a markedly different type and therefore would have hardly been associated with St. Hermolaos by the Byzantine beholder.

What is most striking about this saint is his Christlike appearance, which Nordhagen had already observed. The face, which is a particularly fine example of John VII's style, is in fact not comparable to any other saint's head throughout the church, nor is it in keeping with the iconography of any known saint in Byzantine art. Despite many small *lacunae*, this is by far the best-preserved saint's head in the chapel (Fig. 9). The very darkish complexion is enhanced by the long, almost black, curly hair, moustache, and flowing beard. The middle parting of the hair and the two strands falling on the forehead resemble quite strongly the type of Christ Pantokrator encountered in middle Byzantine mosaic decorations such as at Hosios Loukas and Daphni.<sup>75</sup> In particular the earliest example of this type, again an encaustic icon from Sinai (Fig. 10), shows a number of similarities: the marked asymmetry of the eyes with the stern expression of the slightly larger left eye, the eyebrow being arched higher on that side, is a striking feature that both the Pantokrator icon and the saint in the chapel have in common.<sup>76</sup> The high cheekbones and shadowed concave

<sup>73</sup> Nordhagen, "John VII," 59. The 7th-century pair of medical saints (one probably represents St. Panteleimon) on the southwest pillar of the nave at S. Maria Antiqua does not provide a clue to this problem, since both figures show the same attributes as the two in the chapel, but none of them resembles the type of the figure in question; Wilpert, *Mosaiken und Malereien*, pl. 145.2.

<sup>74</sup> Weitzmann, *Icons*, B.54; Pelekanides, *Kastoria*, pl. 27b; Kitzinger, *Mosaici*, 3: figs. 157, 161. On the Sinai icon, Hermolaos is shown holding a scalpel and a book; at Hagioi Anargyroi, Kastoria, he carries a jeweled book and a scalpel(?); in Monreale he carries a scalpel and a pyxis, wearing classical garments. The accompanying figure, St. Panteleimon, on the icon as well as in Monreale shows the same type as the figure at S. Maria Antiqua that Nordhagen identified as St. Panteleimon; Kitzinger, *Mosaici*, 3: figs. 156, 160; see also the frame medallion of St. Panteleimon on a 10th-century icon of St. Nicholas; Weitzmann, *Icons*, B.61.

<sup>75</sup> Hosios Loukas, narthex; Diez and Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics*, pl. 12. Daphni, Pantokrator cupola; O. Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration* (London, 1947), pl. 7. Compare also the apse mosaics of Cefalù and Monreale.

<sup>76</sup> Weitzmann, *Icons*, B.1. The same type of Pantokrator appears on a solidus of Justinian II at Dumbarton Oaks; Weitzmann, *ibid.*, fig. 3. The asymmetry of the eyes which results in a vivid expression is also found in an icon of St. Peter at Mt. Sinai, datable around 600; cf. Weitzmann, *ibid.*, B.5.

cheeks as well as the asymmetrically drooping moustache and the full lips, too, are quite similar. The same is true of the dark square shadow cast by the lower lip on the area just above the chin. Equally close in both the icon and the fresco is the technique of the brushy strokes of highlights in the beard where the chin protrudes.<sup>77</sup> Weitzmann attributed the icon to the later sixth century and supposed it to have been painted in Constantinople.<sup>78</sup>

But in observing the close relations in style and technique, one at the same time realizes the fundamental difference of expression in the two faces: the stern, quiet gaze of the Pantokrator, which gives an idea of timelessness and is encountered in middle Byzantine church decoration time and again, is totally missing in the saint at S. Maria Antiqua. Instead, this face shows a vibrant, almost sensual expression. With long and marked eyelashes and dark, flowing curls of hair and beard framing the face, the saint's head represents a somewhat Jovian type. This decidedly antique impression is enhanced by the headdress and classical costume the saint wears. In fact, if one of the most often used terms regarding the style of the paintings in S. Maria Antiqua is "Hellenistic," the most distinctly "Hellenic" image in the church is definitely this one. It is in particular in comparison with images of the Graeco-Egyptian god Sarapis and of Asklepios that the classical air of the saint in S. Maria Antiqua is most conspicuous. Smaller varieties of the *kalathos* Sarapis wears on his head come quite close to the shape of the saint's peculiar cap.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, some late representations of Asklepios show the god wearing a wreath in his hair which also resembles to some extent the saint's headdress, an impression enhanced by the equally similar flowing locks and beard of the god.<sup>80</sup> But the shape of the saint's head and the expression of the face seem above all reminiscent of certain types of Sarapis, all of them going back to Bryaxis's famous cult statue at Alexandria (cf. Fig. 11). Sarapis, in one of the many aspects of this syncretistic deity, was a healing god like Asklepios; as mentioned in the beginning, incubation was an essential feature of his cult, too.

All this means little more than an attempt toward a specification, not an explanation, of the classical connotations of the figure in the chapel. It was certainly never intended to give the saint the face of a pagan healing god; it is merely to be understood as the use of an ancient and still familiar pattern that itself evoked a particular atmosphere not necessarily connected with paganism, but reminiscent of its medical associations even in a new context.<sup>81</sup> Summing up, it can be said that the nameless saint on the west wall of the Chapel of Physicians shows a number of peculiarities that set him apart from all other figures of saints and connect him on one side with Christ himself, as is evident in comparison to the Pantokrator icon from Sinai. But on the other hand the figure strangely recalls late classical cult images of Asklepios and in particular of the Alexandrian Sarapis.

<sup>77</sup> This feature is maintained in the Pantokrator cupola at Daphni and in the apses of Cefalù and Monreale; Demus, *Decoration*, pls. 7, 30, 31.

<sup>78</sup> Weitzmann, *Icons*, 15.

<sup>79</sup> W. Hornbostel, *Sarapis* (Leiden, 1973), gemstones: pl. XLVI, figs. 88–93.

<sup>80</sup> K. Kerenyi, *Asklepios* (New York, 1959), fig. 57: head of Asklepios from the Baths of Caracalla; for this type see also *ibid.*, fig. 49.

<sup>81</sup> Deubner pointed to the fact that Bishop Peter of Argos relates the healing activities of the Anargyroi to those of the Dioskuroi, Cheiron and Asklepios. This text shows that the ancient healing deities were not only still in the minds of people in the early Middle Ages, but that there was obviously no objection against comparing them to the saints; cf. Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian*, 57 (Vaticanus Palatinus 317).

In early eighth-century Rome, the image of a saint full of classical reminiscences was in all likelihood no longer suspicious, but perhaps implied already a certain veneration for the achievements and the assumed knowledge of antiquity for the beholder, as clearly do the two eminent physicians Hippocrates and Galen conversing in a much later fresco in the crypt of Anagni cathedral.<sup>82</sup> And, as in Anagni, it is ancient medicine that is evoked in the Chapel of Physicians by the classicizing type of a medical saint who, incidentally, remains nameless. If this figure really represented Hermolaos, the only way for the eighth-century beholder to recognize him would have been his position next to his pupil Panтелеimon. Possibly the painter wanted to create a new iconography of the saint, full of classical allusions, and was relying on the place in the row of saints for his identification. But since type and iconography of the saint differ so completely from any known representation of St. Hermolaos, an inscription would nevertheless have been crucial for the understanding. Therefore, the omission of the name of the most outstanding and unfamiliar figure in the chapel just by accident or for mere reasons of limited space seems rather unlikely. There remains the suspicion that a name for this figure was never intended in the first place.

We can conclude that with the “classical” type of a saint in the guise of Sarapis or Asklepios and the cult image of the chapel, the icon, positioned at floor level, there are two elements that suggest a use of the chapel for incubation: the revival of an ancient iconography strongly associated with this cult form and, above all, the rather peculiar practical adaptation of a chapel to its specific function. Like the dedication of the chapel to medical saints, its postulated use for incubation had perhaps one reason in the history of the site, but was also a result of the influx of Eastern cult forms in the seventh century and of its proximity to the palaces on the Palatine. Nevertheless, an incubation cult seems not entirely appropriate for a place like John VII’s church, used in particular for the display of papal messages. In all probability the *diakonikon* was strongly tied to the *diaconia* of S. Maria Antiqua: it may in fact have been its external chapel.<sup>83</sup> Only a few decades later, the administrator of the *diaconia*, Theodotus, would establish his private chapel on the other side of the presbytery, thus strengthening the ties between church and *diaconia*, while being at the same time a high papal official. Whether or not the Chapel of Physicians would have been the first place within S. Maria Antiqua to serve for incubation remains uncertain. Since the Byzantine influence in Rome considerably antedates John VII’s decoration of the *diakonikon*, it cannot be ruled out that there was already an incubation cult in existence in parts of the church featuring earlier representations of the Anargyroi, namely in the nave.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup> The frescoes at Anagni have been ascribed to the 13th century. For an iconographical analysis of the cycle, see M. Q. Smith, “Anagni, an Example of Medieval Typological Decoration,” *PBSR* 33 (1965): 1–47, pl. 1; cf. L. Pressouyre, “Le cosmos platonicien de la Cathédrale d’Anagni,” *MélRome* 78 (1966): 552–93. Another example of an unsuspicious attitude toward pagan deities may be recognized in the use of the name “Serapis” or “Serapion” for several bishops, saints, and martyrs; cf. Hornbostel, *Sarapis*, 397.

<sup>83</sup> See L. Jessop, “Pictorial Cycles of Non-Biblical Saints: The Seventh- and Eighth-Century Mural Cycles in Rome and Contexts for Their Use,” *PBSR* 47 (1999): 271. On the aspect of court art in S. Maria Antiqua, see Sansterre, *Moines grecs*, 164.

<sup>84</sup> In the church of St. John Prodromos at Constantinople, the sick went to sleep in the north (left) aisle of the nave to await the visitation of St. Artemios, as evident from his miracles; Crisafulli and Nesbitt, *Miracles*, 11, 88–89 (miracle 6), 198–99 (miracle 38). See Mango, “Templon,” 41.



## AN ICON OF ST. ABBAKYROS

There is a portrait-icon of St. Abbakyros in the atrium of S. Maria Antiqua (Fig. 12) which, since it belongs to the whole complex essentially, shall be dealt with in the context of the Chapel of Physicians. The fresco is painted into a large, round-headed, apselike niche cut into the east wall. It has commonly been ascribed to the pontificate of Paul I (757–767), half a century later than John VII's murals.<sup>85</sup> This painting is in large parts particularly well preserved and for several reasons the most "medical" of all the images in the church. The towering head of the saint is set against a pale yellowish halo with a red rim filling almost the entire back wall of the niche. The rather stiffened and hardened style of the painting, if compared to John VII's, succeeds nevertheless in creating a quite intense facial expression (Fig. 13). The high forehead is divided by three deep, rather schematic horizontal lines and a sharp, almost rectangular wrinkle with a marked shadow in the center above the eyebrows. The large, wide-open eyes are set into the face slightly asymmetrically with the right one being placed lower and less wide open, but with a more fixed gaze than the brighter, unsteady glance of the left eye. The left eyebrow is arched slightly higher and thus casts a less marked shadow than the particularly strong right one. The eyelashes are rendered schematically and are not distinguishable from shadows, a noticeable difference from John VII's faces. The thin, long nose is extremely schematic and shows in its pointed tip a negligence of perspective (the nose is given as if seen from above, contrary to the rest of the painting, which is meant to face the beholder). The brushy strokes of shadowed beard below the cheekbones give the face a markedly slim and bony, ascetic appearance, while the huge flowing, cottonlike white beard shows no effort to give an idea of its texture.<sup>86</sup> There is a small rectangular shadow exactly below the tip of the nose.

The mouth of the saint is noticeably small and narrow; the thin lips are parted by the same sharp line that indicates the shadow parting the beard on both sides. The artist did not even make an effort to paint the corners of the mouth, which thus is virtually cut through by the dark line. Beneath the lower lip there are two dark strokes of paint indicating the shaded concavity between lower lip and chin. But there is no protruding chin, and thus the square shadow floats rather meaninglessly on the mass of white beard. The ears are large, and the short white hair is set off from the forehead by a sharp dark curved line from which short bristles stand up and that is echoed by the similarly shaped line dividing mouth and beard. The head is set against the halo with the same kind of dark red line, but this one has almost disappeared. Despite its lack of plasticity and the schematic way in which this face—where the eyes seem to be the only parts set firmly in their place—is painted, the stern gaze of the asymmetrical eyes is still faintly reminiscent of the technique applied in the Sinai icon of Christ Pantokrator (Fig. 10).

The saint seems to be wearing classical garments in red and yellowish colors, but there

<sup>85</sup> Grüneisen, *Sainte-Marie-Antique*, 101, fig. 75; Wilpert, *Mosaiken und Malereien*, pl. 196.4; Rushforth, "S. Maria Antiqua," 98; Osborne, "Atrium," 199. There are two more such niches in the atrium which preserve fragments of paintings. One shows Sts. Agnes and Cecilia, and presumably there was once a third saint of whom nothing remains. The second niche also shows three saints, all dressed in chlamydes. The frescoes have been assigned to the first half of the 9th century; Osborne, *ibid.*, 194, pls. XII, XIII; Grüneisen, *ibid.*, 93, figs. 67, 68.

<sup>86</sup> There is a large *lacuna* in the lower part of the beard.

is a large *lacuna* in the area of the right shoulder, while the surface of the paint on the left shoulder is very worn. In his left hand he holds, between thumb and index finger, an instrument (Fig. 14). The upward-pointing, bronze-brown cylindrical handle has an ornate ending with a knob, while of the downward-pointing end only the sharp head is still visible, just in front of another object held in the saint's left hand (Fig. 15). This end appears to have the shape of a (double-edged?) scalpel<sup>87</sup> (cf. Fig. 16) and shows a markedly different bluish-green, metallic color. The contours are given in black, and there is a black line in the middle (to mark the parting of the two edges?). The color sets the inserted iron blade of the scalpel clearly apart from the bronze handle.<sup>88</sup> None of the other physician-saints in the church shows this attribute, but if compared to representations of the Anargyroi elsewhere, for example an icon of the Virgin between Sts. Hermolaos and Panteleimon and the right wing of a triptych with St. Damianos (?), both at Sinai and attributed to the first half of the tenth century, the object is easily recognized as a scalpel like those carried by the saints on the Sinai icons which show exactly the same ornate handle and pointed blade as seen in the fresco.<sup>89</sup> The attitude of the hand holding the scalpel is similar, too, notably if compared to the St. Damianos panel, which in addition shows three more handles of such instruments in an open surgeon's box the saint carries in his left hand.<sup>90</sup>

The object St. Abbakyros holds in his (invisible) left hand (Fig. 15) is far less easy to classify. It certainly represents a surgeon's box<sup>91</sup> but differs in shape considerably from the examples in the Chapel of Physicians as well as from those shown in the Sinai icons. It also resembles neither the tubular shape of a Roman *theca vulneraria*, nor that of medical caskets where the instruments are displayed in an orderly row.<sup>92</sup> The case appears to be of a rectangular shape and is open. Taking into account the rather unclear perspective, the two square "wings" pointing upward look as if they were handles, but they might as well be the two halves of an ornate lid that could be folded down—although the fact that they are carved or decorated on the inside makes this seem less likely. The interior of the box shows two framed compartments of different size, where obviously medical instruments were to be kept.<sup>93</sup> Two of these objects stand in an upright position in the smaller compartment in

<sup>87</sup> For similar blades, see R. Caton, "Notes on a Group of Medical Instruments Found near Kolophon," *JHS* 34 (1914): pl. x, nos. 1–6.

<sup>88</sup> On the process of making these instruments, see A. Krug, "Römische Skalpelle," *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 28 (1993): 93–100, figs. 1, 2.

<sup>89</sup> Weitzmann, *Icons*, 87–91, B.54, B.55. The same kind of scalpel is carried by St. Hermolaos in a mosaic at Monreale and by several of the Anargyroi in the Cappella Palatina in Palermo.

<sup>90</sup> There are numerous examples of such ornate scalpels known from late antiquity; cf. E. Künzl, *Medizinische Instrumente aus Sepulkralfunden der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Bonn, 1983), 68, fig. 43, no. 5: Vernand (Belgium), formerly Musée de Saint-Quentin, destroyed. Compare also a double-edged knife from Kos (bronze) in Th. Meyer-Steineg, *Chirurgische Instrumente des Altertums* (Jena, 1912), pl. iv, fig. 5.

<sup>91</sup> Rushforth suggested a "case of drugs": Rushforth, "S. Maria Antiqua," 98; cf. Grüneisen, *Sainte-Marie-Antique*, 99: "cassette à médicaments." Osborne and Nordhagen rightly recognized in it a box of medical instruments; Osborne, "Atrium," 199; Nordhagen, "John VII," 58.

<sup>92</sup> Compare the examples in M. Tabanelli, *Lo strumento chirurgico e la sua storia* (Forlì, 1958), 159–60, pls. xi, xii, xiv, cxviii, cxix.

<sup>93</sup> A mid-9th-century fresco at Hagios Stephanos, Kastoria, shows St. Panteleimon carrying a box that has some features in common with the one Abbakyros holds in S. Maria Antiqua: especially the upright standing "wings" are comparable, which are here, too, decorated on the inside. The interior of the case seems to be divided into compartments as well, but it is difficult to make any suggestions regarding the contents of the box. Pelekanides and Chatzidakis, *Kastoria*, 10, 15, fig. 5.

the foreground. Their lower portion—as well as that of the box—is cut off in the painting, but the visible part of the two identical instruments is of a Z-like shape. Both show a broad strip of yellowish highlight on the left side. The nature of these instruments is difficult to tell since they are incomplete and the rendering is rather sketchy. They may well represent pointed surgical hooks with a *spathula* at the opposite end, like second- or third-century examples from Reims (Durocortorum Remorum, Fig. 17).<sup>94</sup> The peculiar shape of these tools as well as the assumption that the scalpel held by the saint belongs to the same “set” let this seem quite plausible. However, the painter might not have completely understood what he was copying, or probably not even had the intention to reproduce a particular type of instrument. Since the two objects in the box obviously are shown only half length, and since the rather longish scalpel should somehow fit in as well, the container needs to be imagined sufficiently deep: its lower part was omitted in the painting for reasons of space. The image is bordered at the bottom by a black strip above a broad white strip and a red zone below, extending to the side walls of the niche as well. The name of the saint is inscribed on both side walls of the niche.

The prominent position in S. Maria Antiqua of St. Abbakynos,<sup>95</sup> who appears no less than four times (two times in the Chapel of Physicians, two times in the atrium),<sup>96</sup> finds its culmination in this extraordinary half-length portrait. There is no other figure of Abbakynos known from Byzantine art where he carries both the attributes he is shown with here.<sup>97</sup> That seemingly matter-of-fact tools like surgical instruments could play an important role in dream oracles during incubation—and hence in the cult of a saint—is evident from the miracles of St. Artemios of Constantinople: in one of the accounts the saint intervenes with a surgeon’s scalpel, in another one he produces a golden medical lancet, and

<sup>94</sup> Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée des Antiquités Nationales; cf. Künzl, *Instrumente*, 61–63.

<sup>95</sup> The Anargyroi Abbakynos and John were popular in Rome during the period of Byzantine influence. Abbakynos, according to legend an Alexandrian physician, later became a monk and together with John, a soldier, suffered persecution under Diocletian in Egypt. The first Roman chapel or oratory dedicated to St. Abbakynos was a 7th-century foundation. This probably took place in the context of the immigration of a Greek community from Egypt during the Arab conquest of Alexandria, in the vicinity of which the first shrine dedicated to the two martyrs had been founded by Bishop Cyril. Rome once contained four or five churches under their patronage; cf. Rushforth, “S. Maria Antiqua,” 78; Sinthern, “Abbacyrus,” 211–25. The earliest Roman church, located at the Via Portuensis, is later known as S. Passera. Relics might have arrived in Rome during the first half of the 7th century; Rushforth, *ibid.*, 79. The transfer of relics could be seen in the context of the Persian capture in 617 and the Arab conquest of Alexandria in 641, but is not documented prior to the mid-8th century; cf. Sinthern, *ibid.*, 212, 225; Avery, “Style,” 149. That Abbakynos had in fact been a physician is not mentioned in Cyril of Alexandria’s report of the installation of the relics and the early cult of the saints. It is most likely a later addition to the legend; cf. Sinthern, *ibid.*, 205.

<sup>96</sup> The second instance in the atrium is a fresco above the niche in question, showing Christ between Sts. Abbakynos and John, who in this painting do not carry any medical equipment. The style is quite different from other paintings in the church, and the fresco certainly belongs to a later period (the atrium was still accessible and in use after the destruction of 847). According to Osborne’s stylistic analysis, the painting may be assigned to the middle or second half of the 10th century; Osborne, “Atrium,” 209, pls. xxii, xxiii; Rushforth thought it to be as late as the 11th century; Rushforth, “S. Maria Antiqua,” 98; Grüneisen, *Sainte-Marie-Antique*, pl. 1C.XV.1.

<sup>97</sup> A half-length portrait of the saint at Hagioi Anargyroi, Kastoria, datable to the later 12th century, shows a type and composition that come quite close to the Roman figure. In the fresco at Kastoria the saint holds a glass vessel in his left hand, pointing to it with his right index finger. The object most likely represents a urine glass; Pelekanides, *Kastoria*, pl. 22b. Compare also a medallion in the narthex of Hosios Loukas: Diez and Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics*, fig. 48. Monreale: Kitzinger, *Mosaici*, 3: pls. 232, 236.

in a third story the saint appears to the mother of a sick boy in the guise of a physician holding a chest of medical instruments.<sup>98</sup>

The sill of some frescoed niches in S. Maria Antiqua contains an oblong cavity that can be seen below the icon of the Virgin and Child in the little chapel next to the schola cantorum<sup>99</sup> and that is well preserved in the niche of St. Abbakynos in the atrium (Fig. 12). As to its function, there have been various suggestions. Rushforth thought that the cavity could have served to hold a light, whereas A. Weis assumed it to be a *sepulcrum* for small, indirect relics.<sup>100</sup> According to Tea, the cavity of the sill below the portrait of St. Abbakynos once contained surgical instruments as relics of the medical saint. The author described these instruments, which came to light during the excavations, as stilettos and a hook-shaped metal stick.<sup>101</sup> These would exactly have been mirrored in the tools shown in the painting above, and it would be very much the kind of indirect and small relic that seems suitable for this kind of *sepulcrum*. Although the evidence Tea produced remains uncertain—the recorded objects seem to be lost—her explanation is quite tempting, especially in the light of the specific character of the saint's attributes in the painting. The apparent effort the painter made to produce a realistic set of medical instruments, which is not encountered in any of the other medical saints in the church, might be taken as an indication that this was in fact what was worshiped here: the sacred tools of a holy physician. But Rushforth was certainly right, too, in suggesting the use of lights in the niche. As the *loculus* was covered with a lid, there were doubtless candles or oil lamps put on the sill in front of the painting, as was the custom elsewhere in the church.<sup>102</sup> Recently Raimund Hermes pointed to the fact evident from the *Liber Pontificalis* that Paul I transferred relics from a number of sanctuaries outside Rome to the city and that in particular the *diaconiae* were to receive them. Considering the assumed execution of the icon in the niche during Paul I's papacy, the relics might have reached S. Maria Antiqua at the same time.<sup>103</sup> Pope Paul I is

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Crisafulli and Nesbitt, *Miracles*, 135, 211, 217 (miracles 22, 41, 42). The Constantinopolitan medical saint Artemios, originally an Egyptian martyr, might be present at S. Maria Antiqua, too. A votive icon in the Chapel of Theodotus shows a male and three female saints, accompanied by an inscription: "(marty)res quorum nomina D(eu)s scet." But the male saint is singled out by a name: "Scs Armentise." As no such saint is known, J. David suggested that this might be a contorted version of "Artemius." The figure's appearance in the costume of a Byzantine official matches the historical Artemios who was *dux Aegypti* in 360. The decoration of the Theodotus Chapel is commonly ascribed to the papacy of Zacharias (741–752); cf. J. David in Grüneisen, *Sainte-Marie-Antique*, 486; Belting, "Privatkapelle," 58, fig. 5.

<sup>99</sup> Weis, "Ikonentypus," 28–29. The semicircular, roundheaded niche with a painted bust of the Virgin and Child at the Coemeterium S. Valentino resembles quite closely the type of the fresco-icon of St. Abbakynos at S. Maria Antiqua. The niche is located in the atrium of S. Valentino—similar to the situation at S. Maria Antiqua—and may well date from Paul I's pontificate or slightly later. Weis, *ibid.*, 37, fig. 12.

<sup>100</sup> Rushforth, "S. Maria Antiqua," 98; Weis, "Ikonentypus," 48. Compare also the small apselike niche with a fresco of the Virgin and two saints in the crypt at S. Urbano alla Caffarella which provides a *loculus* for small relics as well. Weis, *ibid.*, 49–50, fig. 20.

<sup>101</sup> Tea, *Basilica*, 112. See also Weis, "Ikonentypus," 48 note 157.

<sup>102</sup> From the miracle accounts of St. Artemios it is evident that the sick customarily prepared a votive lamp in the name of the saint; Crisafulli and Nesbitt, *Miracles*, 22, 139 (miracle 23). On the use of candles at S. Maria Antiqua, see Belting, "Privatkapelle," 58.

<sup>103</sup> *Liber Pontificalis*, 1:464: "Quae (sanctorum corpora) cum hymnis et canticis spiritualibus infra hanc civitatem Romanam introducens, alia eorum per titulos ac diaconias seu monasteria et reliquas ecclesias cum condecanti studuit recondi honore." See Hermes, "Diakonien," 26. The transfer of relics of the two martyrs to S. Angelo in Pescheria is recorded in 755; cf. Osborne, "Atrium," 207 with note 94.

also recorded in the *Liber Pontificalis* as wandering around at night visiting the poor and sick.<sup>104</sup> The pope's nocturnal visits may well have included *diaconiae*: it even seems more appropriate that Paul's visitation should have taken place within a semi-ecclesiastical institution rather than in some kind of private habitation.

There can be no doubt that the design of this image, as has been shown for other frescoed niches in S. Maria Antiqua, goes back to an older model. Once again, this has to be a famous icon which was copied into the niche in order to accompany the venerated relics kept in the *sepulcrum* beneath. In looking for the origin of the icon of St. Abbakynos, the Sinai icons once more provide at least a hint. The left wing of a triptych at St. Catherine's monastery shows in its lower part the half-length figure of St. Basil (Fig. 18) which has a number of significant features in common with the icon in question here.<sup>105</sup> The saint's head is set against a yellowish-golden halo; the short dark hair is brushed away from the forehead in a similar fashion as in St. Abbakynos's portrait in S. Maria Antiqua. The two markedly horizontal wrinkles on the forehead and the rectangular one just above the brows are found in both cases, too. The eyes of St. Basil, looking slightly to the left, are heavily overshadowed by the eyebrows, as on the whole this darkish face shows much more plasticity and texture. The extremely thin straight nose, here again painted as seen from slightly above, is quite similar in both cases, as is the shadowed hollowness of the cheeks, the parting of the lips, and the cottonlike, brushy texture of the flowing beard. But all these features are painted in a much more masterly way in the portrait of St. Basil, whose almost sculptured face shows a vividness of expression and an overemphasizing of the play of light and shade that is in complete contrast to the St. Abbakynos at S. Maria Antiqua, whose large staring eyes seem to be the only substantial part in a face that is otherwise almost transparent and gives the impression of floating in front of the halo.

The St. Basil icon is at the same time more sketchy (note, e.g., the rendering of the fingers) and more successful in giving the impression of vividness, movement, and bodily volume. The attitude of St. Basil's right hand, holding a heavily jeweled book that he supports with the left, is comparable to that of St. Abbakynos, and one could imagine that his left hand—which has been omitted in the fresco—should support the box in the same way as St. Basil's left hand does the book. From all this it is evident that the fresco-icon in S. Maria Antiqua probably goes back to a model of very much the type of the St. Basil icon at Sinai. The apparent differences in quality and in the rendering of details are explained by the considerable time lag. The Sinai icon has been attributed by Weitzmann to a seventh-century Palestinian workshop.<sup>106</sup> Thus the original icon of St. Abbakynos, which was reproduced at S. Maria Antiqua, in all probability antedates the actual fresco by more than a hundred years, having been painted at a time when the style of which the fresco is reminiscent was still a living force. Considering that the saint's cult reached Rome during the first half of the seventh century, and its Alexandrian origin, it seems indeed very likely that the image reflected in the Roman painting was an Eastern icon of the earlier seventh century. This assumption would be in keeping with the suggested date of the St. Basil icon

<sup>104</sup> *Liber Pontificalis*, 1:463: "Hic, ut multi testati sunt, nocte per semetipsum cellas pauperum infirmorum periacentium, qui ex suis nequamquam adsurgere valebant lectulis, necnon et aliorum inopum cum suis familiaribus noctis circuibat silentio, amplissime illis ministrans alimonia atque subsidii inferens opem."

<sup>105</sup> Weitzmann, *Icons*, B.24.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 48–49.

representing more or less the type one has to think of here. Thus a cult image was painted in the fashion of an older, certainly well-known icon from Mount Sinai or probably Palestine; the actual model for the fresco might have already been a copy itself. Perhaps, as the relics kept in the *sepulcrum* were possibly surgical instruments, the Roman (or Byzantine?) painter added the peculiar set of medical tools to the figure in order to emphasize their actual presence.

For the Byzantine beholder, image and prototype became nearly identical in this painting: the (copied) famous (probably miracle-working) icon of a saint whose presence in the image was enhanced by the (indirect) relics in the *loculus* below, not visible, but there and reproduced above in the picture itself. A more demonstrative presence of a saint in his image is hardly conceivable. The described artistic shortcomings of the fresco—if compared to the style of its suggested model or to John VII's decorations—might not be merely due to a lack of craftsmanship in the artist. If one has to describe the qualities of the picture, it is certainly the startling, almost luminous transparency and the lack of bodily volume and weight one encounters in this face that sets it apart from more lifelike figures. In fact, the spiritual presence of the saint in the icon seems reflected in the style of the painting, giving an impression of quiet timelessness. The fresco-icon of St. Abbakyros in the atrium therefore represents perhaps the least “Hellenistic” image in the church, to use again a term so often applied to earlier parts of the decoration at S. Maria Antiqua. There is no indication of the space or motion that is so typical of the vividness of “Hellenism”—there is just “presence.”

In several fresco-icons Nordhagen discovered traces of metallic objects, presumably precious votive gifts that had once been attached to the figures in the paintings. He also found traces of nails formerly inserted into the surface of the frescoes in order to attach either an ex-voto object or an oil lamp to it.<sup>107</sup> One would expect such a practice to be of particular relevance in connection with the cult of medical saints. In fact, there is an example from Sophronios's *Miracles of Sts. Abbakyros and John*, in which a patient gathers oil from a lamp burning in front of a holy image and subsequently uses it with salutary effects. The man, suffering from gout, is advised in a dream during incubation by the two Anargyroi (after they had won Christ's approval) to act as follows: “Now proceed to Alexandria and go to sleep on an empty stomach in the great Tetrapylon. Take a small quantity of oil from the lamp that burns there, high up, in front of the Saviour's image, put it in a little flask and, still on an empty stomach, come back here. When you have anointed your legs with this oil, you will receive the gift of health.”<sup>108</sup> The spacious sill of the niche of St. Abbakyros, above the *loculus* for the relics, was presumably used to put candles or oil lamps and perhaps other votive offerings in front of the image. Considering the procedure described in the *Miracles of Sts. Abbakyros and John*, and the evidence Nordhagen found for the role

<sup>107</sup> Nordhagen, “Icons Designed for the Display of Sumptuous Votive Gifts,” *DOP* 41 (1987): 454; idem, “Seventh Century,” 141–42.

<sup>108</sup> Sophronios, *SS. Cyri et Ioannis Miracula*, 36; PG 87.3:3548ff; trans. Mango, *Byzantine Empire*, 136; cf. Kitzinger, “Cult of Images,” 106 note 86. A practice evident later from the Chalke icon at Constantinople—having been restored after its destruction during Iconoclasm—involves a veil that hung in front of the icon and cured Alexios I and the Protostrator Alexios Komnenos, whose wife then dedicated an embroidered purple cloth, also to be suspended in front of the image; C. Mango, *The Brazen House* (Copenhagen, 1959), 132–33.

votive gifts played within the cult at S. Maria Antiqua, it seems possible that, for example, the oil of a lamp put on the sill in front of the icon was perceived by the pious as absorbing its power both from the presence of the saint in his image—illuminated by its flame—and from his relics kept in the *loculus* just below. The oil from the lamp, thus endowed with beneficial power, could then have been applied as a remedy.<sup>109</sup> Although there is no documentary proof available for this kind of practice having been a custom in Rome, one has, again, to take into consideration that S. Maria Antiqua was a church largely frequented by a Greek community taking part in imported cult forms and that the image itself depicts an Eastern saint, copied after an Eastern model. Thus the examples quoted from Byzantine sources might indeed give an idea of what was actually practiced in eighth-century Rome, too.

The painting may well have been donated by a Byzantine or papal official, as was suggested for other icons in the church.<sup>110</sup> Considering the existence of the already decorated Chapel of Physicians and the nearby *diaconiae* of S. Maria Antiqua and S. Teodoro, it seems likely that this image of a particularly well equipped medical saint (who was already represented twice in the church when the icon was painted) was intended to receive the worship of the sick cared for in the *diaconiae* when entering the atrium of the church and thus already there encountering one of the most celebrated of the particular class of saints to whom parts of S. Maria Antiqua are dedicated.

Paul I's additions to the decoration of S. Maria Antiqua were executed at a time when hostility toward images was a dominating force in the East. Together with the frescoes commissioned earlier in the century by John VII, Paul's paintings—still reminiscent of Byzantine prototypes—testify to an undisturbed continuity of cultic practices in Rome that can only be described as decidedly iconophile and profoundly rooted in magic. This is, within the given specific context, particularly true of both the imagery in the Chapel of Physicians and the icon of the medical saint Abbakkyros in the atrium of the church. In an environment like this, the suggested use of the chapel with its icon as a space for incubation seems very much in keeping with the idea of Rome around A.D. 700 as a predominantly Byzantine city.

Bibliotheca Hertziana

<sup>109</sup> The Miracles of St. Artemios provide an example, where the likeness of the saint itself is taken as a remedy: after having a vision of St. Artemios in his sleep, the patient waking up finds a wax seal bearing an image of the saint in his hand which he then softens and uses as a salve; Crisafulli and Nesbitt, *Miracles*, 108–9 (miracle 17). Kitzinger, "Cult of Images," 107.

<sup>110</sup> Nordhagen, "Icons," 459; H. Belting, *Bild und Kult* (Munich, 1990), 133.